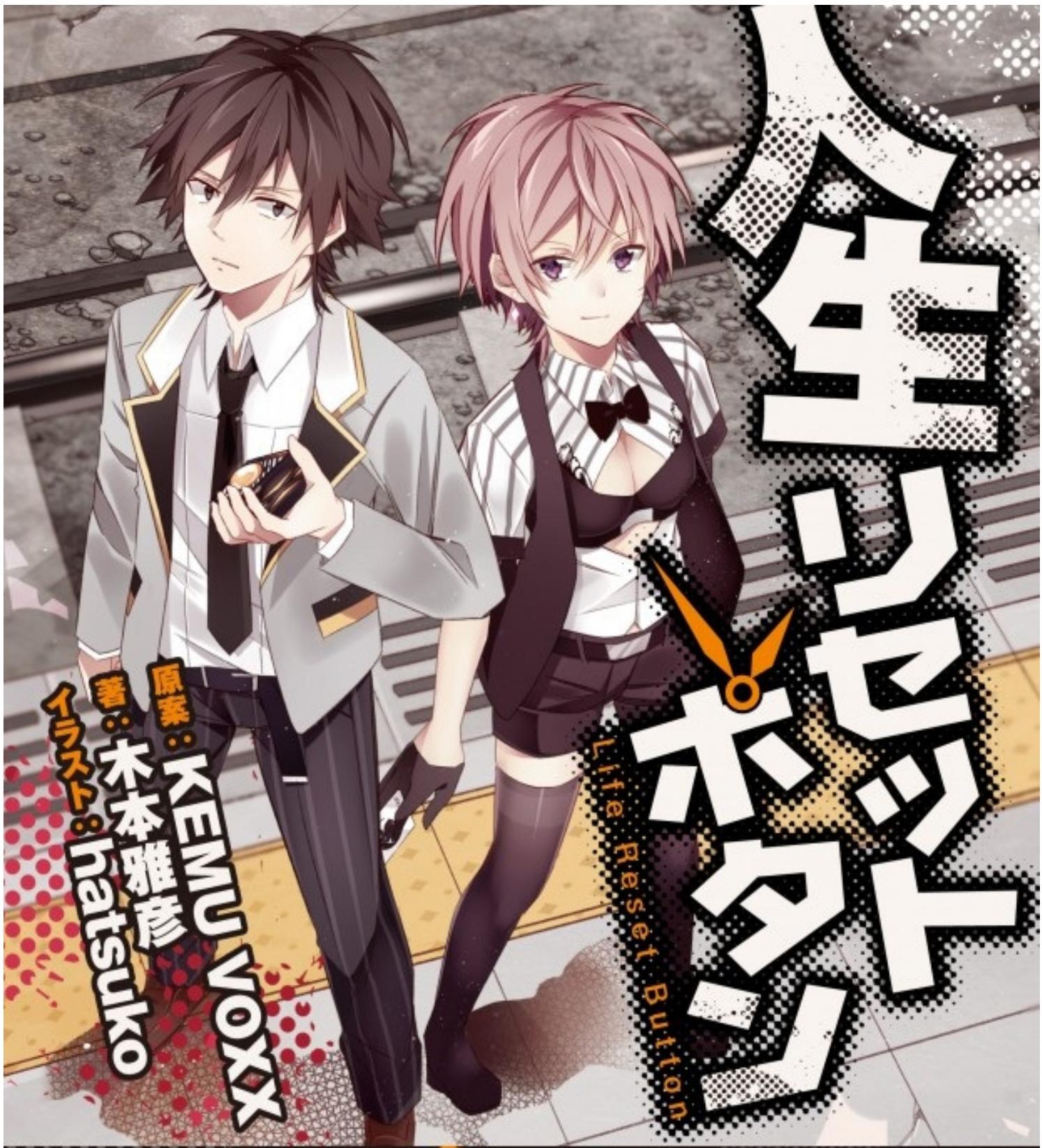




人生リセットボタン

KEMU
VOXX

超人気クリエイター集団
“KEMU VOXX”衝撃のデビュー作
「人生リセットボタン」が待望のノベル化!!!
Life Reset Button
PHP研究所 定価: 本体 1,000 円(税別)



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Life Reset Button

» Life Reset Button - Character Profiles

As promised, here are the character profiles from the Life Reset Button novel! If you don't know what that is, take a look at the intro post [here](#).

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Sorry for the quality of the scans ;___;

I probably won't be scanning the rest of the novel illustrations, since that's more dubiously illegal and also because I won't have a scanner.



Cover Illustration by hastuko



藤吉 シュウ

ユウトの数少ない親友。
ユウトとは男同士の友
情で結ばれている。意志
が強い反面、頑固なこ
ともある。

杉田ナツキ

ユウトとは小学校からのつ
きあい子供好きで、世話好
きな女の子。

Illustration by hatsuko



橋立タイシ

ユウトの兄。完璧で潔癖な超人。ユウトの憧れの人物だったが……。

橋立ユウト

本作の主人公。半ば偶然のきっかけで、人生リセットボタンを手に入れる。プライドが高く、根拠の無い万能感を持っている。



マキちゃん

人間の願い事をかなえる神様だが、ちょっとピントが狂っていて、たまにトンチンカンヅなことをする。

From top to bottom, right to left:

杉田ナツキ

Sugita Natsuki

Has known Yuuto since elementary school. Likes children and helping others.

藤吉シュウ

Fujiyoshi Shuu

Yuuto's long-time male companion. He has a strong will, but on the other hand, can be quite stubborn.

橋立ユウト

Hashidate Yuuto

The protagonist of the story. Partly by accident, the Life Reset Button came into his possession. He is very prideful, and holds the baseless belief that he can do anything.

橋立タイシ

Hashidate Taishi

Yuuto's big brother. He is a perfect and tidy genius. He's admired by Yuuto, but...

マキちゃん

Maki-chan

Though she's a god that grants the wishes of humans, sometimes her implementation is a little off, so the results are different from what was intended.

[Get started →](#)

Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes - Pt. 1

[PANDORA VOXX novels masterpost](#)

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—

Chapter 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes

Part 1

I simply wanted to become a perfect, tidy, kind of being.

–That was who my brother was.

You probably know the story of dropping the axe in the spring. *Did you drop a golden axe? Or perhaps this silver one?* It's a pretty famous fable.

Of course, the answer is just as famous; just say “No, mine was an old iron axe” and you’ll receive both the golden axe and the silver axe. If anyone were to encounter this situation now, they would be sure to answer this way. After all, anyone who knows the right answer is able to get by fantastically. My brother was someone who seemed to know all of the answers in advance. If he were to meet the goddess in the spring, he’d boldly laugh and say the answer as if it came naturally. “I admit, my axe is iron. So then, I guess I deserve the golden and silver axes.”

The goddess surely would not deny him these. And so my brother would end up with all three axes. The thought of discarding the iron axe would cross his mind but-

“If I don’t have that axe, how will I do my work?”

He was the kind who also managed to keep touch with reality.

My brother was perfect, and tidy. He’d be able to see right through the

aforementioned situation and reason his way to the correct answer.

That's why I aspired to become like him, why I thought I perhaps could become like him.

I wonder how he's doing right now?

My perfect brother, boldly laughing, breezed his way through the exams and left home to attend college. He studied sciences with names like "Biofrontier" all cluttered with katakana**, and I couldn't even tell what exactly it was that he studied. My mom said, "Well, since it's him, he can't go wrong, I suppose," and sent him off.

He'd said, once, "I want to create a perfect world."

I was simply an ordinary middle schooler, wanting to be perfect and tidy like my brother.

He had always been by my side, yet at the same time shining brightly far above me, and now he had started on a path apart from mine. So as stars that I had pointed at faded before my eyes, I was left, swimming aimlessly in an empty sea of unease, like a kite cut from its spool.

"Even if an obstacle in your path disappears, don't get carried away."

I still remember these ill-tempered words from my homeroom teacher. I'm not sure what he thought of his own family. But if I were to surmise based upon the nuances contained within those words, I would say he probably had an older brother or sister — that was his complex.

Of course when I think of my teacher's words, I also think of my brother's.

"The thing with teachers is, they're bound to hold some sort of complex or another. The most common one is where, having graduated college, they start teaching right afterwards and therefore have no idea about the world beyond teaching."

When he said this, my brother was in high school, and I had just entered middle school, and so I listened, while, slightly shocked, wondering if it really was alright to talk about teachers in this way. And my brother, as always, simply laughed his bold laugh.

Unsurprisingly, I felt for my brother, who surpassed everyone in things he did, a feeling that itself surpassed respect. So when he disappeared from my life, I became nothing more than a young man utterly unable to surpass anything.

However, for some reason, I believed I could become like him, and did not doubt that belief.



****TL note:** Katakana is one of the Japanese alphabets, usually used for foreign words.

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Life Reset Button Novel

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Chapter 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes

Part 2

Class observation day.

It had never occurred to me that now I was a middle schooler, there would be this sort of event. To me, class observation day was something that one must go through with the attitude that it was no big deal. That was because, for my brother, it wasn't something that he got worked up about either.

That's why I, while nervously looking out of the corner of my eye at my classmates, tried to be unaffected by the anxiety settled tightly in my chest, and went on with class without losing my composure.

"Alright, who's visiting from Hashidate's side?"

"My mom. Who else is there?"

"Hah, that's right. God, isn't there anyone whose pretty older sister is coming along?"

"Don't you have an older sister?"

At this, my classmate looked rather taken aback.

"I said a pretty older sister, didn't I? My sister looks a monster."

This older sister he spoke of had done volleyball in high school, and so had very impressive muscles, as well as huge breasts. With just that, she was object of jealousy of many of her friends.

"Anyway, even in our second year of middle school we'll have these class observation days, huh."

"Geez."

My school was slightly unusual. Its mission statement was "For active conversations with parents! For parents to be actively engaged in education!", so there were many events where guardians could participate. Class observation day was one of these events.

"Hashidate, c'mere."

A group huddled in the corner by the window called me over. As usual, I gave a reply and moved toward the window.

"Try drinking this, it's really gross."

For whatever reason he thrust out a bottle filled with some green stuff at me.

"Stop that, he's not interested."

"Nah, if he doesn't take this challenge he's not a man. If it were your brother he'd do it. I believe in him."

"Let's bet on how many sips he can take."

"What does the winner get?"

"How 'bout a date with your little sister."

"Don't screw around like that."

A classmate near me butt in:

"If we take the gross drinks at the convenience store and mix them, they should be even more disgusting, yeah?"

Occasionally, the class would become excited like this over my confidence in eating unbelievable things.

"Alright, I want to see this, Hashidate Yuuto drinking this juice while keeping his cool!"

"I'm not drinking this. Why would I drink something if I knew it was disgusting?"

"Ah, you're so spineless. Not such a man after all, I see."

Saying that I was a coward was as cruel as telling me to drink that bottle. But

there was no way I was backing down now after being told that.

“All right, I guess I’ll drink it.”

I grabbed the drink off the table, braced myself and raised it to my lips.

My first impression was that it was cold. “I can drink this,” I thought. I swallowed a mouthful, bringing it to the back of my throat. Once it reached there, I felt the most awful taste in mouth.

Surpassing being merely bitter or sour, it was the epitome of disgusting. I almost barfed.

“Yuuto! Yuuto!”

I was surrounded by the sound of clapping. While I listened to their applause, I took a second gulp, then a third, and held my breath.

“Yuuto! Yuuto!”

“Yuuto! Yuuto!”

A clapping rhythm spread throughout the classroom. Everyone was looking at me. I’ll show you the manliness of he who drinks the world’s number one most disgusting drink.

Ah, I’m stupid. Being made to perform like that wasn’t necessary. With a bottle of juice of all things.

But I would’ve hated being laughed at for being unable to drink it. I knew I was simply playing a fool to avoid being called a fool, but I couldn’t possibly back down at that point.

Besides, to stop drinking at this point would be to throw away all I had gone through.

I closed my eyes as it made its way down, down, down my throat.

By and by the bottle became empty. When it left my mouth, a rotten, foul stench was emitted from my stomach.

I took a breath of fresh air.

Unexpectedly, the atmosphere of the crowd was cold.

“Bo~ring.”

“I was thinking he might cry.”

“Alright, stop, show’s over.”

The bored voices of my classmates increased and overlapped. In the meantime, I chucked the bottle out the window.

Yes—as you can see, I wasn’t too popular with my class. Whenever my classmates called me over, it was only to amuse themselves with the resistant attitude I put up. Of course, I don’t mean every single one of my classmates. I knew there were those few who told the others to stop messing with me. However, for the most part, my classmates thought of me as someone who wouldn’t break even after being bullied, as long as they didn’t toy with me too much.

They didn’t toy with me too much.

Even after being bullied and laughed at, I didn’t get mad. I knew that getting mad would only make me lose. So I didn’t get mad, much less cry. That was what they expected. So I was simply laughed at.

But I had better things to do.

Even with being laughed at, being made fun of, I never forgot about being perfect and tidy.

So, I laughed along.

“Hmph,” I snorted, as I stood up and left.

The first class in the afternoon, fifth period, was uneventful. During the next break period, I opened up the notebook I had thought to prepare for the sixth period class observation session.

“Hashidate, lend me your notebook,”

Said a classmate, and grabbed the notebook from my hands. I didn’t get what was so great about this notebook to a guy who couldn’t even make his own prep notes, but well, I thought, what’s the harm in letting him see it?

At that moment, I got an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of my stomach. I’d better go to the restroom in case, I thought, and was about to get up from my seat when

"Where do you think you're going?"

The classmate who had taken my notebook barred the way to the restroom.

What a bother, I thought, and was about to go over there and teach him some manners when break ended.

Then he tucked the notebook under his arm and said,

"Sorry, but I'll be borrowing this."

And went back to his seat.

About the same time that my math teacher entered the classroom, my parents, who'd been waiting in the hallway, came in from the back door of the room.

My mother had been looking forward to this school event. As far as my mother, who had seen what her other son could do, was concerned, school was a place that was loved and praised by children.

The teacher, who was much more sharply-dressed than usual, clapped his hands once, twice. "Everyone, face the front. Class is starting."

—10 minutes later.

I was stricken with a pain from the very depths of hell.

My stomach hurt. It was clearly in much pain. There was no doubt about it.

It was extremely painful.

It was all because of that juice from lunch. That uncomfortable feeling in the pit of my stomach from the break period hadn't been just a fluke.

It felt like my intestines were moving to and fro. As soon as that thought crossed my mind, they seemed to suddenly face inward and contract into a whirlpool.

Your abs, use your abs. But putting power into it didn't work, and flexing them was no good. Though hardly able to keep my balance, I was able to control the spasms of my innards.

Otherwise—it would come out!

I began to tiptoe out, my butt slowly lifting from the chair. Catch your breath. Think positive. Balance your strength. Concentrate, don't lose your focus.

Ah, it's no good.

No, I can't do it, even if I tell myself to just brace myself and hold it out. Relax, relax.

"For the next problem...Hashidate-kun."

Just why did you have to call my name with such horrible timing.

Ah, whatever. If I just answer what I have written on my notebook, it'll be... wait, my notebook, he took my notebook!

Think, c'mon, think. You've done this problem before, just calm down and think, and you should be able to get it.

Think, thi...well, don't overthink it! You'll go under!

"What's the matter, Hashidate? Please stand and come up to the board."

I stood up, slowly, without holding in or releasing any strength.

I breathed in, deep, thin breaths. Slowly, slowly.

Everyone had noticed by then that something about me was not quite right. I could feel the curious whispers closing in on me. As I reached the blackboard I looked over my shoulder. At my parents. They looked at me curiously.

My eyes met with my mother's. I knew that she knew that I was not myself, that she was perhaps a bit worried for my well-being.

"Do you not understand the material?"

"No, I understa...nm'h"

Safe. But please don't make me talk.

I turned towards the black board, and raised my arm up, gripping the chalk. Slowly, now. Calm your mind and think.

I started to write out the equation. With each strike of chalk against chalkboard came a dry, grating sound. It was a somewhat comforting sound.

Yes, this was a good rhythm. I solved the equations one by one as—wait, what

do I do here?

Even though I'd practiced this kind of problem, even though I'd done this problem once before, I just couldn't remember how the rest of the equation was supposed to go. Here, I should be thinking about what to do next, but all I could think about was the feeling in my stomach. I tried to concentrate as the word "remember" whirled around inside my brain.

The chalk stopped.

Remember, remember, remember remember.

Remem..ah, that's it!

As I moved to write the next part, I heard a noise from behind me—

Kablam!

I turned to look behind me on reflex. It'd just been someone dropping their textbook on the ground. I turned to face the board again.

It felt like something was twisting my stomach. My insides lurched, hurting like someone was wringing them out.

Ahh, I can't do this!

There's really no way I can do this!

I put up with it until the very end, with all of my strength..but I didn't make it.

The strength in my lower abdomen gave out. The feeling that had been weighing down on me suddenly disappeared—it was truly a relief.

After several moments had passed, I felt a warm sensation spreading from my butt down my legs—and then a smell I knew all too well.

I couldn't move. I'd done it.

I'd done it, and there was no going back.

Shrieks echoed throughout the room.



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Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes - Pt. 3

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Chapter 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes

Part 3

Uggh, euggh, guh gueeeh.....ueegghhhh....guohh, guo, guouegh...I can't tell.....if my nose is running.....or if those are my tears...uu...ueuuuhhh...uuuee... uehhh...ueggh hh...aaa...aaaa...gkktsu...I can taste...the bitterness....in my throat....ggkkksktn uukkglgggg..... ggglggaklag ngaknggag.....gggggg...kug hh....kutgh....kkkkeugh.....it's no use....I can't go on like this...uuuhgh...uuu....h... I'm gonna die....yeah, Im gonna die..kgikggkk....I wanna disappear....and die....just be gone.....people'll laugh at my funeral....kksss...ggskshit....i just wanna disappear.....be gone and done with it all..... gggk gktkg....ggfuckc....shitshitshit....I'm in no way perfect....or tidy.....in what I'm doing....all I am is shit-stained.... wha....wher.... gkkghht...shit....ggh... ueuuu_{uuuuu}gueee^{uuugiu}uehghhhh.....

♦

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Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes - Pt. 4

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Chapter 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes

Part 4

Shuu Fujiyoshi was a friend whom I'd known for many years. He wasn't just a classmate to me, but a friend in the truest sense of the word.

While I was stumbling off to the bathroom, he had settled the whole affair with the rest of the class, and walked home with me.

“Don’t worry about it.”

“I can’t...”

“Forget the whole thing.”

“I can’t...”

Shuu matched my naturally heavy footsteps with his own lighter ones.

“You know, you—”

He stopped suddenly.

Though Shuu was skinny, his body was packed with muscle, giving him the physique of a Chinese martial artist. Naturally, he was good at any sport. As for academics, he'd always maintained an above-average status. Unlike my other classmates, he wasn't the type to simply go with the flow—once he'd decided on something he'd go through with it. His heart was nigh immovable—he was truly a “rock”, in the best sense of the word.

Shuu was manly. Or, even more concisely,

he was a man. A man among men.

Then in comparison, I was...

"What's past is past; there's nothing we can do about it. Not only that, but if you keep fussing about the incident, it'll just become more fodder for others to tease you with."

"I can't..."

"Geez."

Basically what he'd told me was that I was on the verge of breaking. Shuu was the only one who dared say things like that. In my quest for perfection and tidiness, I'd always acted on my own, and so I'd always thought of myself as one who wouldn't break even after being bullied by his own classmates.

Shuu was the only person who could say that I was going to break.

I'd been hanging out with him ever since middle school. When we first met, he was the one who had come up to me first. Everyone around us stopped to see what he would say. At first, I'd been apprehensive of him, but I now held him in high regard, and saw him as a friend to whom I could show my only weakness.

Unlike how it was in elementary school, we didn't get to walk together for long.

"Want me to walk you all the way to your house?"

"It's fine..."

I appreciated his comforting me, and I knew that he'd be fine with listening to me say "I can't, I can't" over and over again, but, I, still striving to be perfect and tidy, knew that sticking around wouldn't do me any good.

We split up at the fork in the road before us.

As we went our separate ways, he reached out and smacked me lightly on the butt. I never thought of something like that, between him and me, as dirty or anything.

"That looks like sexual harassment..."

"Dumbass."

We parted and continued on our separate ways.



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Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes - Pt. 5

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This portion was really long;; anyway, it's Maki-chan's debut! Enjoy!

—

Chapter 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes

Part 5

When I was left to myself, a feeling of loneliness washed over me, soon replaced by despair.

Without Shuu, who had been comforting me until just now, my good spirits lost their footing and crumbled like sand.

Jeez, shitting my pants even though I was in middle school. Well, no, middle school has nothing to do with it. Just shitting myself in front of other people.

For someone as obsessed with perfection and tidiness as myself, having that mask of tidiness so brazenly shattered was a huge deal.

How could I go on living and face tomorrow?

This was a black spot on my 14 years of personal history. No, to call it a black spot would be putting it too lightly. It was more like a brand burnt into my personal history, one I could never erase.

Pooman. That's what they'd call me. And then, my past, one I would never be able to reset would follow me even as I graduated from middle school to high school. The fact that I had leaked in front of my class would be known throughout the students, such that when meeting people for the first time, they would know the story, and address me as Pooman without a second of

hesitation. Uwaaa! Why the hell, even though I don't know you at all, why the hell do you know that I once shit myself?

That calmness that I barely held on to had now deserted me, as uncertainty and chaos descended suffocatingly upon my heart.

Why did it turn out like this!! Why did it have to be this way!!

Why!!!!

All my life, I had...all my life? Yeah, my whole life. Until I died.

I had shit my pants. In the classroom. In front of everyone. In front of my parents. The Pooman.

I felt all the future words of scorn, sympathy, pity, contempt, wash over me in an overwhelming wave. Must all of this scorn continually wash over me until I die...?

I just want to disappear...

Or I could do it all over again. From this morning. No, starting from when I arrived at school. Even starting from the beginning of that class would be fine. I want that thing that happened today, all those memories, to disappear even if I had to destroy that part of my brain...!

—Will you wish?

I got the impression that someone was talking to me.

It was the voice of a young girl, whispering close by my ear, quite as if she were speaking directly to my brain.

—Will you wish?

I heard it again.

I definitely heard it.

Someone was asking me something.

Where was this person?

I looked back over my shoulder and checked my phone, staring off into the empty space, trying to locate the source of the voice.

—It's pretty cramped, isn't it?

What's so cramped?

—Yuuto's world is currently about 2 meters in diameter. He is writhing within this tiny circle. Inside of his small world, what will he wish for? What is the strongest desire in your heart?

"Who are you?!"

I looked around me, and noticed for the first time.

All color had disappeared from this world.

The space all around me was entirely light and dark, defined only by black and white contrast.

No matter how many times I rubbed and blinked my eyes, the world around me remained monochrome.

"Eh? What, what's this?"

I looked closely and saw that I myself still had color. It was only my surroundings that were black and white.

"What the hell is going on?"

Some kind of thin crack had appeared before my eyes, slowly spreading out, giving the road I always took home the look of stained glass. The pieces of this mozaic kind of alternated between floating and sinking, and the world before me took on a peculiar sense of three-dimensionality.

Was the world destroyed or something...?

No.

It was I who had been destroyed. Something in my head had gone wrong from the shock of shitting my pants.

A single shard of the mosaic flew out and fell far below me.

At that signal, the rest of the pieces succumbed to gravity one by one.

"Uwaah! Uwahh! Uwaah!"

The fragments of the mosaic beneath my feet were yanked out like teeth, and I lost my footing as the ground below me started to collapse.

I desperately made to cling to those fragments of the road I walked to school, but no matter how I grasped at those shards, they always fell away, evading my grasp, until I too, was flung softly into empty space, falling alongside the fragments of reality.

Ah, it'd be nice to keep falling like this forever—

The instant that thought came to mind, my eyes met with a young girl seated on one of the falling pieces, floating in mid-air.

"Eh?"

The girl—she had color.

She had on a black vest and a white shirt, and short, red hair cut in a boyish look.

Her long legs, extending form her shorts, dangled lightly, as if she were bouncing.

"My name is Maki-chan."

She suddenly introduced herself by name and flashed a grin at me, giving the feeling that this was some elaborate prank she was playing.

Seeing that I was rather taken aback, she continued,

"Well then, shall we replay?"

and clapped her hands together.

A white screen appeared in front of me.

Everything else around me became dark, and a buzzer sounded, signaling the start of the movie.

The numbers counted down, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.....start.

Just like one of those old movies, the film was in black and white.

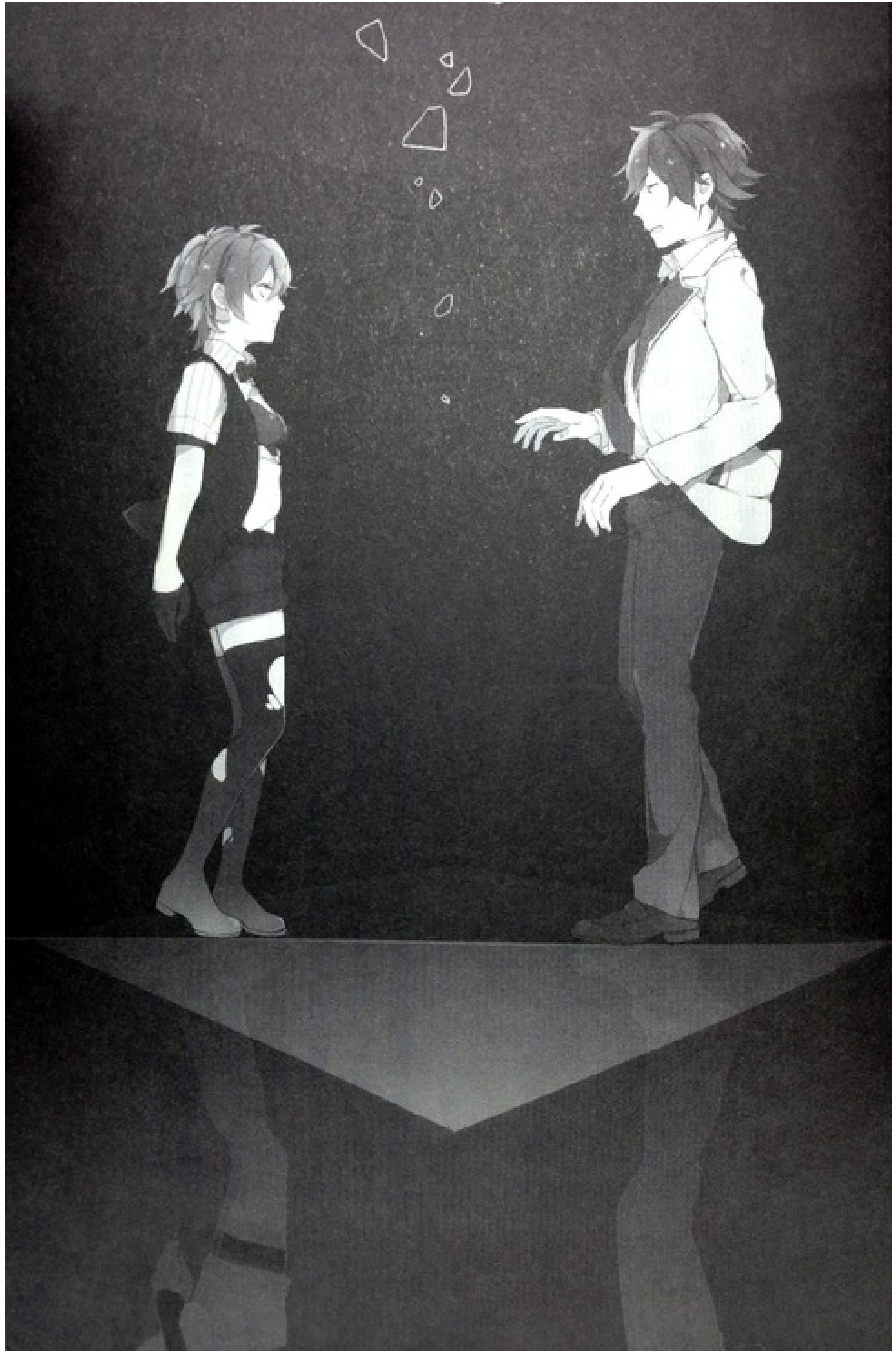
The camera focused on a certain incident that I would rather not recall.

"Wh-what the heck, what's going on..."

Displayed on the screen was my own self standing in front of the blackboard, gritting my teeth as I battled with my raging bowels.

"Stop it! Just stop!"

I cried out to whomever was controlling the movie.



The image of my writhing body, almost at its limit, hung over me.

"Stop!! I said, stop it!"

I waved my hands like a madman, trying in vain to break the screen. However, no matter what I did, the image stayed as if it were burned into my retina, refusing to disappear. Meanwhile, the me on the screen was doing an unsightly dance.

That other me eventually reached his limit and soiled himself, falling to his knees. The image was so real that I could almost smell it.

"Aa~aah!"

At the sound of Maki-chan's voice, I snapped back to reality.

When I looked up, she was back to her bored self, swinging her legs more forcefully than before.

"Aw, geez! That was a let-down!"

She gave me a scornful glare as if she were mad, as if I bothered her.

Stop that! Don't look at me like that! Today I've been glared at like that, tens, no, hundreds of times!

Isn't that enough? Don't do that! Don't do thaaaattttt!

"Is that all you have to say?"

She heard my thoughts?

"I was drawn here by a powerful wish, you see, but I guess all I got was poop. It's weird, why do you have such a strong wish when this is just about something like pooping..."

Something like pooping?

What, like this is just about something like pooping?

"...Hold up, I can't just let that go. What was up with that?"

I was pissed off. I mean, to be told something like that, from a girl I had just met no less, was something I couldn't just sit there and ignore.

"What the hell, I mean, I shit myself. Don't you get it? I literally shit myself, in class, in front of everyone. Don't you get how much that crushed my pride? And not only was my pride crushed, so was my inner self. Not to mention that it was class observation day. That's twice the number of eyewitnesses than it would've been on any other day. So me shitting myself is a huge blow to others' respect for me, don't you see? And you call that 'something like pooping'? Do you even know what that you're talking about?"

I unleashed a barrage words telling Maki-chan just how off-target she was about my situation and pooping.

And well, she just sat there listening, trying to stifle a smile, but in the end something that I had so much emotion about was something that I had to spit out one way or another.

"...well, the wishes of people vary greatly, don't they? There are the terminally ill who wish to live just one more day, and there are people who, having soiled themselves, wish they would die..."

With a half-smirk on her face, she continued.

"You know, I came here to hear out your wish, Yuuto. I came to hear you yell it out."

What the hell is this girl saying?

"My...wish...?"

My wish? Then it dawned on me. I wanted to become like my big brother, tidy and perfect. What did she say I was supposed to do? Yell out my wish?

Now it was my turn to half-smirk.

"Maki-chan, what are you, some sort of god?"

I said. With a smirk.

Hearing that, Maki-chan turned to face me, not bothering to hide any of the scorn she held towards me.

What the hell. Don't give me that look again.

"Aah, perhaps you don't believe me? Well, not just any old wish. That's no good, I tell you. Earlier, you had an extremely strong desire, ringing from your inner heart and soul, that's what I want to hear. That intense desire was what I was drawn to earlier, you see?"

An intense wish, huh...what could it have been?

As if she were reading straight from the depths of my heart, Maki-chan continued.

"Didn't you wish to start it all over?"

"Start over? Well, I guess I did want to start all over again. Alright, that's what I'll do, start over! I'd make a deal with the devil to make that happen! Make it so I never shit myself in class, R·E·S·E·T my whole day, how 'bout it?"

I yelled out. I was half crying by the time I got to the end of that little speech.

Maki-chan nodded, satisfied.

"Strong indeed. If you so wish, then I can let you start over."

She waved her right hand over my head, making cards pour, one after another, out of thin air. The way she made them flow out of a crack in the air made me think, where did she learn that trick? The cards were a little like playing cards, a little like tarot cards; one side had a complex pattern on it, while the other had some sort of design, kind of like a drawing—

She waved her right hand, swoosh, from left to right, lining up the cards. The movement seemed so natural that I couldn't help but wonder if she were actually a magician.

The cards were pattern-side up, such that I couldn't see what was on the other side.

"This is your whole life."

This time, she swept her hand from left to right. She seemed to be having fun. The cards flipped to the back sides, still lined up neatly, as her hand passed over them.

My life was depicted on those cards.

From my birth, to when I first stood up, to my first words, to me following after my brother, to walking with this girl, my childhood friend, to school, to playing with my friends...my whole life was laid out in front of me like a row in Sevens.*

Maki-chan picked a single card from this array, and held it up to the light. Monochrome light shone through the card such that I could see right through the center of it. This one was a memory from my elementary school days.

"Do you remember?"

I remembered. It was during lunch when I was in 1st grade. For some reason I couldn't bring myself to eat the carrots in the stew, so my teacher had gotten mad at me, and I had been left alone in the classroom, with three carrot slices that I could not put in my mouth. I had been on the verge of tears. It was then that my classmate, Sugita Natsuki, gallantly appeared, taking the spoon from my hand and scooping the carrots into her mouth in an instead. "It's lunch, let's go play," she told me, and pulled me along by the hand. I had seen my inability to eat carrots as a major hurdle on the road to perfection, but Natsuki thought of the matter as no big deal and simply pulled me along. I felt like I should express my thanks, but couldn't for the life of my figure out how exactly; what came out of my mouth was,

"You're amazing, to be able to eat carrots."

It would've been better to say something more clever, with more substance, but at that time, it was all I could come up with.

"Well, they're pretty yummy. And sweet,"

She replied, grinning.

We stopped in the hallway, changing our shoes as if we couldn't waste another second, and raced off to the school yard. Once there, we wormed our way into the circle of our classmates, and until the bell sounded the end of our lunch break, we played away, as if in a dream.

From that day on, I tried my best to be able to eat carrots. If I could bring myself to eat them, then I felt that Natsuki would smile at me once more, and praise me for it...

I looked down at my life laid out before me. There were only as many cards as I had memories. It seemed that if I picked up one out of these countless cards and shined light through it, I would be able to experience that memory, like I what did a few minutes ago, clear as day.

Maki-chan peered close at my face and inquired,

"Will you wish? Will you not wish?"

I saw my image reflected in her large eyes.

Will I wish...huh.

My only wish was still only to become like my brother. To be perfect, and—

With the events of today, those efforts had all gone to waste.

If only that hadn't happened. If only I hadn't made the wrong choice.

This life is no good.

I want redo it.

I want redo it!

"I found it. I found your strong wish."

Maki-chan reached out both hands and placed them over my heart. Then she slowly sunk them into my body, grasping my heart. She nodded her head curtly with a "Hm!", as if she had been making sure that it could still react, then slowly withdrew her hands. In her hands was a button.

"This button will grant your wish. It will switch out your memories."

"Switch out my memories...like it'll make me forget?"

"There is a set amount of memories you can retain. Therefore, if you ever want to switch out your memories with past ones, press the button. If you wish strongly enough, it will happen."

Maki-chan placed the button in my hand.

"See, your life will go as you please!"

The cards, having been neatly lined up, suddenly flew up and scattered. I saw my memories raining down.

Amidst the flurry of cards, Maki-chan stayed sitting as she was; even as she dissolved, she remained floating in the air. She seemed as if she had lost all interest in me, instead looking towards tomorrow and the day after, while humming a tune.

The monochrome world faded to a bright white.

I could feel my consciousness spreading out as I fell into a deep slumber.



[Next part →](#)

Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes - Pt. 6

[PANDORA VOXX novels masterpost](#)

[← Ch. 1 Pt. 5](#) ♦ [Ch. 2 Pt. 1 →](#)

Please consider supporting the creators by buying the novel from [Amazon](#), [HMV](#), or [YesAsia](#)! All three ship internationally.

With this “Life Reset Button” in hand, I might as well be invincible.

By the way, I decided to add in low-quality scans of the insert illustrations, so there’s one in Ch. 5 that you should go check out! because Maki-chan is cute as heck. Illustrations seem out of context but that’s where they are in the book, down to the line, so that’s that.

Edit: I’ll keep these illusts in but won’t add anymore because I have no scanner

Anyway, this is the rest of the chapter, because I don’t want to swamp everyone with updates. Future chapters will probably end up like this, too, in either 2 or 3 parts.

—

Chapter 1: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes

Part 6

Jiriririririririri!

My alarm clock wasn’t a digital one; rather, it had a metallic bell chime and a round clock face, with two silver bells on top.

This alarm clock jolted my heart and brain awake.

As I lay on top of my bed, I could see the blue sky from the gaps between the curtains.

Blue as the sky was, I felt my mood cloud over, spirits plummeting.

I had an unpleasant dream.

Some weird girl had appeared, and replayed yesterday's cringe-worthy events in black and white.

I couldn't help but resist as hard as I could in front of that screen. However, it had continued to play.

Man, why did I have to think so much about something that I never want to remember again?

And because of that, my day started out terribly.

Strangely, though I usually one to savor the comfort of the futon just one more second, last night I was so unsettled that I had tossed and turned all night.

It's today already...

Just as it dawned for everyone else, the day dawned for me. Even for someone like me who shit his pants in class...

The first order of business was to find an excuse to take the day off from school.

I mean, of course I would call in absent the day after shitting myself in class, but I needed some kind of official leave. If I went to school people would definitely call me the Pooman - well, they would call me the Pooman even if I didn't attend, but being called that directly, seeing people snicker at me out of the corner of my eye, and having people look at me like I was some dirty object was something I couldn't stand.

Well, that's right.

I was something they couldn't stand.

I, who was striving to be perfect, had become the pinnacle of imperfection, the Pooman. That was too paradoxical—one of them had to go.

Either the fact that I had shit my pants had to go, or the me who had shit my pants had to go...

While mulling over those thoughts, I flipped over onto my back and faced the ceiling.

I didn't think about it too deeply, but at some point, I noticed a small box floating in the space between me and the ceiling.

The hexahedron rotated in midair, alternating between tilting and straightening itself.

I stared at the cube without touching it, almost forgetting to blink.

Hmmm.

Close your eyes. Count to 3. Open.

Still floating.

This time, count to 10.

Still floating, rotating.

I remembered. The dream that I had had last night reconstructed itself in my head. It was all real. In that monochrome-dyed world, I had received a button from a girl named Maki-chan. Oh yeah, didn't she tell me to yell out my wish? And that my life would go as I pleased.

—Will you wish? Or will you not?

she'd asked.

And I had answered.

I'll make a wish!

I want to redo it all!

As if trying to grasp my vividly recalled memories, I reached out with both my hands to capture the object before me. The instant my fingertips brushed against the box, it dropped onto the bed. Reflexively, I made to catch it, only to lose my balance and tumble from the bed.

I crawled toward the bed and took the box in my hand.

It was a small enough to fit in my palm. It felt too dense to be plastic, too light to be metal.

—Will you wish? Or will you not?

The words "Go ask her what to do" echoed in my head. Do you have

something you wish for? Or do you not?

I wrapped my hands around the box, and thought of my wish. As the wish formed clearly in my head, I could feel my hands getting warmer. I opened them up, and saw that the cube had changed its shape. The box part was somewhat thinner, there there was now a red button on the top. It was probably—no, definitely—the button.

If I push this button—

If I...

Hm?

Did Maki-chan even say what would happen if I pressed the button? Wait, wait. Did I even ask how to use it?

Ah, but at that time she had said,

“Yell out your wish, Yuuto.”

My wish? The thing I had wished for back then?

Maki-chan!

I called out to her silently. You know, since it was morning and all, and if my parents heard me they’d certainly think of it as weird...

I didn’t feel even a hint of a response that time, so I called again, softly, out loud.

“Maki-chan...”

No reply. Was she ignoring me?

“Maki-chan!”

What the hell’s with that, just leaving a button and disappearing, and not showing up when I call for her in my time of need? Besides that, where’s my user’s manual? What about my customer service?

I’ll press it and see what happens...

Now this was the most intuitive interface I’d ever seen. When faced with a small round button rising from its base, the most basic human reflex is to press

it. I don't have the stats to back it up, but I'm sure it's true.

On the other hand, what if it were a self-destruct switch? That would certainly be a troublesome way to grant my wish for myself to disappear. I wonder if it would start blaring sirens and a countdown if I were to press it.

Maki-chan had asked me, "Do you have a strong wish?"

—You could redo your life.

Is that true, I wondered.

Could people's strong wishes be granted simply at the push of a button?

I mean, with humans, even when there is absolutely nothing they can do, even when their lives are screwed up beyond possible repair, the fact there is no such thing as a button that can reset your life is a given.

Of course, if this were indeed that sort of button, I would not hesitate in the slightest. After all, I was already screwed up beyond repair; whatever happened to me now, there was no way I could fall further than I already had...

I placed my finger on the button.

—Do you have a strong wish?

I have it right here.

—Your life will go as you please.

I certainly hope so.

—Switching out Yuuto's memories.

I had been making a fool of myself, trapping myself in the past. Better to face forward—to live facing no direction but forward.

For my future.

For the sake of my perfect and tidy future, I would use this button.

What exactly would happen when I pushed it?

There was only one way to find out—

Boom!

I had the feeling that I was blurry. Like I had been in an earthquake...no, like that time I watched a 3D movie without the glasses...

Another big wave shook me. It really was an earthquake!

I lay down on my stomach. My surroundings continued to shake. Everything was unstable. I had no idea what was going on.

I looked for a place where the bookshelves wouldn't fall on me. Was the bed safe? As I looked up, I became aware of a feeling of discomfort, if I could even call it that.

My room itself was shaking. In the way that my bookshelves had no chance of falling. There was no possibility that the bed would slide, or that the things on my desk would go flying. My room, and everything inside of it, wavered back and forth. Except for me.

The room started rumbling.

Gradually the oscillations became stronger, and as they did, I was thrown off balance.

What is this? —Time and space itself...?

The foundation of the room disappeared, and I was promptly flung out from "reality".

A blinding light surrounded all the matter that had been there before, which then dissolved into grains of light moving farther and farther from me. The light rotated once around me, and reverted to its former state. It was like being told "farewell" and "welcome back" at the same time. I felt both unease and relief. And then unease again.

Where did I come from?

Where should I look to?

Everything was flowing by. —Flowing away.

I had been whisked away from my reality, and would probably land in a new one soon.

There were still no shadows. That proved that I still hadn't actually landed anywhere yet. I was not yet a resident of this reality.

The world continued to waver. It still wasn't "definite".

While I mulled over the situation, Maki-chan's voice resounded far above me.

—That button has the power to reset your life. Wonderful, is it not?

Eh?

—So, this is the start of a perfect New Game.

With this one step forward, the world would be defined. A new world to start a new game.

—Something like that.

My heart was firm.

The wavering stopped abruptly, and then—



Jiriririririririri!

My alarm clock wasn't a digital one; rather, it had a metallic bell chime and a round clock face, with two silver bells on top.

This alarm clock jolted my heart and brain awake.

Seconds later, I was struck with intense vertigo. Though I knew that I had just now been lying down asleep, an inability to distinguish vertical from horizontal washed over me and receded, like a wave.

At that moment, my head cleared, and I was slowly filled with a sense of discomfort.

—Right. I had pushed the button.

I leapt from the bed and checked my clock and calendar. It was class observation day.

Did I...go back in time?

No, perhaps I had unconsciously changed the date on the clock and calendar.

I plugged the charger into the wireless notebook on my desk and opened up a news site. The date was the same.

I had returned to the morning of that day!

It all felt very unreal. Aside from the date on the calendar, it felt like any other morning.

But the fact of the matter was that I had gone back in time.

Was it because of that wish of mine? Maki-chan had told me that she would switch out my memories and all that, but it didn't seem like I had forgotten anything or that there was anything wrong with my head at all.

Well, that was no difficult matter to ascertain.

I changed clothes and went down to the kitchen for breakfast. My mom was there,

"I'm going today."

Hearing these words for the second time made me set aside my disbelief. If this were merely an elaborate ruse planned by everyone to trick me, then well, I had no choice but to wish to redo that horrific day again.

Still, even as I went to school, and sat in class, I was torn between acceptance and doubt, until, at lunchtime—

"Hashidate, c'mere."

A group huddled in the corner by the window called me over.

Ah, here it is. This is where it all started.

I gave a reply and moved toward the window.

"Try drinking this, it's really gross."

"No thanks."

"C'mon, just one little sip."

"Nope."

I snatched the bottle from my friend's hand and chucked it out the window. I could hear what sounded like a teacher's angry voice from down below, and people ducking for cover.

Not my problem.

And with that, I had thrown away the starting point of that horrible day. Thanks to that reset button.

I went back to my seat and began preparations for math class.

“Hashidate, lend me your notebook,”

demanded my friend, and grabbed my notebook. I thought, I have questions to prepare for, so even though it’s a bother, I’ll deny you coldly so you know who’s in charge here. Before I could, he said,

“Sorry, but I’ll be borrowing this.”

and went back to his seat.

Lunch ended, and class began. At the next break, I went to retrieve my notebook, but the culprit was nowhere to be found. I secretly rifled through his desk, but it wasn’t there either.

Class started.

When my math teacher entered the classroom, my parents, who’d been waiting in the hallway, came in.

“For the next problem...Hashidate-kun.”

I have no notebook!

Just as I decided, there’s nothing I can do about it, so I’ll just think on the spot, I noticed something important.

“Oh, that’s right!”

“What’s the matter, Hashidate?”

Ignoring the suspicious look the teacher was giving me, I took the button from my bag.

Simple, isn’t it. I should just reset.

If I mess up just a little, all I have to do is redo it.

—I want to go back to lunch break!

I wished in my head, and pressed the reset button.

I arrived once again at lunch break.

Clutching the notebook I took from my desk, I dashed off to the restroom.

I'll just stay here until the bell rings. And study while I'm at it.

I went back to the classroom when the bell rang, went through fifth period again, and came back at lunch to hide in the restroom.

When I heard the bell ring, I headed back to the classroom. My math teacher was already there, and my parents were lining up at the back entrance.

"What's the matter, Hashidate?"

"Sorry, I went to the restroom for a bit."

"With your notebook, I see. Splendid. I'll have to let you answer the first question."

I opened up my notebook, and went up to the blackboard to answer the question. I'd studied, so it was just a matter of transcribing the answer.

"I'm finished."

"Correct, well done."

Clear.

I had cleared the New Game that Maki-chan had set up for me.

Was that how it was. Fail, and redo. Redo over and over again, until I get it right, and continue. Within the endless possibilities, just pick the success story. I could get on the path of a perfect life, one like my brother's. I had the means to do it.

With this "Life Reset Button" in hand, I might as well be invincible.



Sugita Natsuki was the one girl who had been my classmate all the way from elementary school until now. Depending on how you saw it, you could call her my childhood friend.

In my childhood days, it wasn't uncommon for boys and girls to play together, but even with that in mind, she was special to me.

When we entered middle school, though we were in the same classes, we started drifting apart. Girls had friend groups with only girls; there was no longer space for me in her life.

This was also when the boys started to see their female classmates as members of the opposite sex, so at outdoor education class, we talked about who was cute, who had the biggest breasts, and so on.

“As for me, well, Sugita’s my type of girl,”

I remember someone saying.

She had been pretty popular with the boys. I mean, she wasn’t the absolute most gorgeous girl in our grade, but from what I saw, things were going pretty well for her. In terms of how much she stood out among the others, I’d say she was about the second most noticed. Furthermore, as the leader of her group of girl friends, a lot of people went to her for advice.

I think that ever since I acquired the Life Reset Button, I had become a lot more confident. That came as no surprise. If I failed, I could just reset. Even if I encountered an unfavorable situation, I could act with confidence, prepared to reset at a moment’s notice.

After seeing others repeat their own mistakes, the thought that I, too, once repeated mistakes, made my skin crawl. I had had my share of failures up till now, but I could reset whenever I wished. In terms of just the end results, I had become someone whose life was devoid of failure.

That was where I differed from everyone else.

Take for example, Sugita Natsuki, who was standing in English class at this moment, holding a printout in her exhausted hands.

She was reading aloud, tripping over her words; unusual, for a girl whose English was normally impeccable. It was completely understandable, though, given that she had just received the printout, not to mention that it included a huge amount of new vocabulary. If only she had read ahead in the textbook beforehand, she wouldn’t have to stumble over the vocab now.

Upon seeing her falteringly read the English aloud, and then falteringly translate it into Japanese, I let out a sigh.

There was no choice.

Sugita Natsuki was special.

I reached into my bag stealthily, so as not to be seen by the others, and groped for the button.

—Reset. The world wavered.

I returned to last night.

At first I thought about calling Natsuki's house, but I didn't want to make too big a deal of it. I probably had Natsuki's number in my phone. Last year, at outdoor education, I was in the same group as her, and when we went mountain hiking the whole group had exchanged contact info in case anyone ran into a bad situation.

Texting was a safe bet.

"It's me, Hashidate. I have a feeling that English is going to be pretty challenging tomorrow, so I think it would be best to practice up to a few pages ahead."



A plain message, but it would do.

The reply came immediately.

"Wait, how can you tell? Not to mention, why do you have my number?"

"Don't you remember, everyone exchanged numbers at outdoor ed last year."

"Oh yeah, huh. In case of emergencies, wasn't it."

"Not like there was any need."

"Sure wasn't. We're off track! Back to talking about tomorrow's English class!"

How do you know? Did you hear it in the staff room?"

"I feel like...the teacher will make us read from a printout instead of the textbook"

"That it, huh? Maybe he will...but why did you have to text me about it?"

"I feel like he'll call on you"

"Why"

"You're the call-on-able type"

"How rude"

"I was kidding"

"You're interesting"

"Am not"

"That was a compliment. And you're calmer than you used to be"

Calmer, huh.

"I can't deny it."

"See, the way you replied just now was interesting too. Anyway, thanks, good night"

"Okay"

She ended it by saying "good night". Geez, this girl.

...nah, she had always seemed to me like the type who would do that.

Sugita Natsuki had never made a show of the fact that she was someone the class revolved around. She always talked normally with boys.

Anyway, there was nothing more I could do to help her here. In order to exert any influence outside of my own direct actions, I would need more time.

I closed my cellphone and drifted off to sleep.

The next day in English class, as I predicted, Natsuki was selected. I wondered if she had come prepared. Sure enough, she gave us a splended reading of the material, with perfect pronunciation on even the most difficult vocabulary.

The class, surprised at the unexpected printout given to us, was even more surprised at the fluidity with which Natsuki read the passage.

Except for me.

At lunch, Natsuki came up to me.

“Your prediction came true, huh.”

“Hm. Not a prediction, per se.”

“There it is again, that composed attitude!”

“Can’t deny it.”

We both laughed. I was relieved to see that I was comfortable enough talking with Natsuki for us to laugh like fools together.

From that day on, the friendship between Natsuki and I became closer and closer.

“Hey, Hashidate,”

asked Natsuki one day. Since we had known each other since elementary school, and lived near each other, we would ocassionally walk home together.

“Where are you going to high school?”

“Kurihara East High School.”

I answered without a second’s hesitation. Normally, with a school so hard to get into, I wouldn’t be sure if I would be able to get in at all, but here I could just use the reset button until I got accepted.

“That’s impressive. I still haven’t decided. The teacher told me that based on my grades, I’d be a good fit for Karima High.”

“That’s pretty impressive too.”

“Don’t give me that ‘pretty’ impressive crap.”

“My bad.”

“What should I do? Ah, it’s so hard to choose between schools...”

“You can say that again.”

I pretended to ponder for a moment, then spoke up.

“I think it’s fine to choose based on where your friends are going. After all, studying with your best friends is the most fun.”

“Yeah.”

“Furthermore, the entrance exams for high schools are all different, so it’s probably a good idea study for exams with people aiming for the same school as you are.”

“Ah, then maybe I should try for Kurihara East?”

“Eh?”

“Hm?”

I’d said “best friends”, right? Then...does it? Does it mean that to Natsuki, I hold a special position as one of her best friends?

Is that it? Is that true?

How good of a friend is a “best” friend?

Maybe so good of a friend that, with the impetus of trying to get into the same high school together, she wanted for us to get closer?

My heartbeat quickened.

What should I do, what should I do. This is the first time I’ve felt like this.

Reset? —No, that would be bad. Really bad.

No choice but to continue. No resetting.

We walked on in silence.

Her pace was slower than mine, so I consciously slowed my own to match hers. The scraping of my shoes against asphalt rang out intermittently. Perhaps because they could sense the intentions of humans, the sparrows on the telephone wires above all flew off as a flock.

It was Natsuki who broke the silence.

“Wanna study together?”

“...sure.”

“Thanks.”

I thought, the rest of my middle school days are gonna be bliss.



Turns out, with the reset button’s help, my middle school days really were full of bliss.

Not long after acquiring the button, I had taken it upon myself to find out as much about its capabilities as I could.

Firstly, although I had used it almost 100 times up to that point, the button seemed not to be counting the number of times I pressed it. At least, there wasn’t any markings of the sort on the box as far as I could tell, nor was there any sort of countdown-style noise emitted whenever I pressed the button. I was supposedly having my memories “switched out”, but I hadn’t seemed to have forgotten anything, and nor did I encounter any situations where I couldn’t recall something. Perhaps if there were such an effect, it occurred where I wouldn’t notice. Anyway, although it wasn’t like I freed myself of all reservations, recently I had been resetting without hesitation.

Still, I knew better than to go around resetting at random. Whenever I reset, I took into account the “law of cause and effect”—the law saying the all events have a cause. Even if I reset, if the cause remained unchanged, the effects would still occur.

For example, one time, I was hit by a soccer ball kicked by one of the players on the soccer team. His unapologetic manner made me seethe, but since I hadn’t dodged the ball, I was the uncool one here. So I reset, and settled myself elsewhere; however, the ball came flying by again. But I had punished that guy by stalling him in the hall beforehand and making him late to practice; furthermore, that time I managed to dodge the ball. It was all a pain in the ass, but that was what it took to dodge the law of cause and effect.

Whenever I reset, I had to understand how to make things go my way.

It was always best to have a goal clear in my mind. To go back to a certain point in my life, I had to wish for it strongly while pressing the button. Wishing so

clearly and consciously took a bit of practice to get used to, but now I could return to any point in the past that I wanted to.

Whilst I made audacious resets, I kept those points where important decisions had been made. This was my strategy for a “perfect” life.



And so, the high school entrance exams approached.

Because of the fact that I was always with Shuu, combined with the “Wanna study together?” from Natsuki, the three of us often studied for entrance exams together.

Shuu offered up his place, and since we had nowhere else to go, we took him up on it.

“Fujiyoshi, what about your parents?”

Shuu answered Natsuki’s inquiry curtly and readily.

“They don’t get along. Besides, my mother has work, and my father doesn’t come home often.”

He said it like it was no serious matter, so at the time Natsuki and I hadn’t noticed the gravity of the situation at hand, but when dinner time rolled around and still no one had come home, we felt kind of bad.

“Hey, shall I make dinner?”

“Wait, how about we go out for dinner somewhere?”

“Don’t bother, leave it to me.”

There were plenty of ingredients stocked up in the fridge, so from the looks of it, Shuu was used to cooking for himself. Natsuki took some out and quickly whipped up a meal for the three of us.

“I wish I could do that.”

“This way we really look like a family.”

Natsuki let out a laugh as she said that. Since I had known her for so long, I knew that she wasn’t one to neglect others in need.

As the three of us gathered around Natsuki’s creation and dug in, the

conversation shifted to our future plans. Why we talked about such an immature subject, I don't know, but I think the three of us there, in the home of the boy whose parents never came home, felt like we were somehow tied to the same fate.

Or perhaps, tied to the same future. The same life.

I spoke up:

"I have a big brother, and I want to be perfect like him."

"It's good to have a goal in mind,"

Shuu affirmed my aspirations concisely.

"Is your big brother really that perfect?"

"Yeah."

I replied immediately, as it was obvious to me.

"More than being perfect, he surpasses everything. I have never seen him do wrong."

"But Hashidate, unexpectedly, you do everything perfectly too."

True. That's only because I reset whenever I'm about to fail. Naturally, that was something I couldn't disclose to Natsuki.

"Hey, Sugita, what do you want to do when you're older?"

"I think I want to be a nursery school worker."

"Oh, like a teacher in a nursery school?"

"Yup. Since I like working with kids, and besides, I can't imagine myself ever working behind a desk at some big company."

"But I think you would do well even in a corporate environment. Since you're popular and all."

"Nuh-uh. Oh, that'd be so nice, working at a small nursery school and taking care of little kids all day."

I tried imagining her working in a nursery school. It was easy to picture her at a small nursery school, helping with little tasks and serving food in small pieces.

"I think Sugita would make the perfect nursery school worker."

I knew "perfect nursery school worker" was kind of a weird thing to say, but it

was true; I thought Natsuki's dream was perfect for her.

"C'mon, don't say that. But I'm really glad you think so," she laughed, while hitting my shoulder.

Shuu broke in:

"Hey, for studying, I think we should rotate between our homes. How 'bout it?"

Natsuki, flustered, quickly refused, "No, I'll have to pass."

"Why?"

"It's obvious. You're guys, you can't come into a girl's room."

"That can't possibly be the only reason."

It was a common excuse, so Shuu accepted it without question, but I, who had known her since grade school, knew the truth. Natsuki loved superheroes, and had mountains of those transforming action figures in her room.

Even in middle school, this fact probably hadn't changed. So she would never invite classmates—especially male ones—into her room.

We discussed our aspirations late into the night, so Natsuki and I returned home long past curfew, and were scolded harshly by our parents.

—

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Life Reset Button Novel

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“...Sorry. I don’t think I could ever go out with you.”

—

Chapter 2: Even On the 3000th Confession

Part 1

“Congratulations on getting accepted!”

I heard someone shout from a short distance away. Glancing in that direction, I saw several burly members of the rugby team gather around one of the accepted students and hoist him up into the air. Circling the rugby players was a girl in a sports uniform (the manager, perhaps?) who raised her hands above her head and applauded the new student.

I was at the acceptance announcement for Karima High School. It was true that the results could be found out online, and it was faster and took less effort to look it up, but despite that, quite a few students had gathered here to see the names listed on the bulletin board, wanting to see the results officially on paper.

Above me were plum blossoms, just beginning to bloom, and beyond that was the cold early March air, which still had a bit of a sting, and the painted sky.

I looked up at the bulletin board, recognizing my testing number immediately.

I then turned to a student who was handing out pamphlets nearby, and asked,

“Excuse me. Could I have...one of those?”

“Are you an admitted student?”

“Yeah.”

“Congratulations! Everyone, here’s another admitted student!”

“Wait, um...”

“Congratulations again!”

Yes—in the end, Natsuki, Shuu, and I chose Karima High School.

The girl—a beautiful girl, if you were to ask me—bent over slightly and looked up at me.

Are you going, or not?

Those were my options.

The golden axe, or the silver axe?

Since I was but an ordinary middle school student, when I had choices thrust upon me, I had no choice but to choose one or the other. One voice in my head insisted that I shouldn’t give that high schooler the satisfaction of having me go, but another advised that since I was going to come here anyway, it would in my best interests to branch out a little and make connections.

Was I going, or not?

The golden axe, or the silver axe?

I should branch out.

My reply came in barely a whisper.

“...I’ll go.”

“Alrighty! Reeled one in!”

A boy from the high school beckoned to me and told me that there were already about 10 people gathered at a family restaurant nearby.

After being told to sit and obeying, I found a glass of orange juice set down in front of me.

“Unlimited drinks. My treat.”

The boy sat himself down next to me in an over-familiar manner, and peppered me with inquiries of “What’s your name? What school are you from?”, obviously enjoying himself all the while. I nodded and smiled, while slowly sipping away at my juice.

Metaphorically speaking, what color axe do I have now, I wondered.

Raising my eyes, I looked around at the other students who were clearly also middle schoolers. Like me, they were admitted students on the track to become first-years come April. There were those who hesitated, quivering, and those who were putting on an act of gallantry; it was clear that none of us were yet quite at home in this kind of situation.

“No, not really.”

“Hm? Did you say something?”

“No, it was nothing.”

That was when I noticed that this student’s build wasn’t as burly as the others that I had seen so far.

“What club are you in?”

“Am I in? This semester, ooh, the restaurant might have a special on tea.”

“Rugby?”

“Hah, what the hell’s rugby. I’m not with those guys from the admission announcements. I’m in season sports club, which means tennis in the summer and skiing in winter.”

I’d been thinking of just staying in the same club that I’d attended in middle school, but there was more variety to clubs than I’d imagined. I had never heard of a club where you could do tennis and skiing.

High school certainly was shaping up to be a whole new experience.

And I was going to become like these students.

And so, the next hour passed by with idle chatter.

“Aw, senpai, that’s no fair.”

The beautiful-girl-if-you-were-to-ask-me who had talked to me earlier barged into the family restaurant none too subtly. Her unruly hair reflected her extroversion, but even more than that, her large eyes and long eyelashes commanded attention. She had looks that drew people’s attention, and she knew it. If she were to raise her voice, everyone’s gaze would be drawn to her. Therefore, the tone of her voice and every little gesture had to be precisely calculated.

She plunked herself down next to me and ordered a glass of non-alcoholic wine (there was such a thing?) for herself.

“Yo, what middle school?”

“I went to Sasayama Middle.”

“I’m from Central Nakasato Middle.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Hey, quit it with the formal talk.”

“But you’re my senpai.”

She looked taken aback for a moment, then opened her mouth and let out a great big laugh.

“Nah, I’m just another admitted student. I was accepted early via recommendation, and I ended up just loitering around the school doing nothing, so this club member here came and talked to me.”

Oh, so she was the same age as me. My anxiety melted away. I shifted my sitting position, and instead of sitting with my shoulders drawn in, I puffed out my chest a little. I lifted my gaze a little higher. The girl who I’d thought was my upperclassman was simply a classmate.

“My names Risa. And you are?”

“Hashidate Yuuto.”

“Yuuto, huh. You got a girlfriend?”

She dropped the honorifics right off the bat, and used my first name, to boot.

This sure is different from middle school, I thought. In my three years of high school, I had only met one girl who had come to call me by my first name. I had always thought that was the norm, but upon my entering high school, here came this girl who spoke to me like we’d been friends for years. I was surprised, to say the least.

I wasn’t exactly thrilled with that. After all, this Risa girl didn’t seem like she would be of any help in getting me to my ideal of perfection.

She was accepted on recommendation, so she loitered around the school? And that guy’s club roped her in? Not to mention, that she was beautiful?

No doubt about it, she was going out with some senpai already.

For the second time, I looked around the family restaurant. Is it him? Maybe him?

If I were to approve of such a fulfilling lifestyle, it would be a grievous insult to my perfect life thus far.

...Well, might as well go along with her for a bit, just to see where the conversation takes us.

“Okay, which one do you think is my girlfriend?”

“You don’t have one. You seem like the grim-future type.”

“It’s not grim, it’s bright as anything. I’m popular, you know.”

“Liar~ That’s a total lie. You don’t have to put on a mask, you know. Tell big sister the truth.”

“That doesn’t even makes sense.”

“Hey, I was born in April. I’m older than most everyone in my grade.”

“April what?”

“Second. In elementary school, I was always first on the roster.”

“April 2nd, wow, that’s about as early in the school year as it gets. I’ve never met someone like that.”

“And it’s the truth, I swear. Anyway, do you have a girlfriend? C’mon, spill.”

“Shut up.”

For some reason, this back-and-forth was kinda fun.

I myself was astonished at the rate at which I said unexpected things.

This is pretty nice, I thought, being free to carry out a conversation without getting all caught up in worrying about stuff like slight changes in facial expression or nuances. Stress-free conversations were nice.

“...I have to bounce back in college entrance exams.”

Risa didn’t miss what I said with a sigh.

“Hmm? Don’t tell me, you’re one of those who got in despite dropping in rank?”

“Wait, not really—”

My cellphone sounded from the depths of my pocket. A text. When I saw the contents, I responded with a sigh of relief.

“Your girlfriend?”

“Nope.”

Not yet, anyway.

“Mom?”

“Not her either...I’ve gotta get home.”

I stood up. Risa looked up at me with surprise written all over her face.

“What happened? You have something you gotta do?”

“...By talking with you, I have deviated from the path to perfection. Seeya.”

I grabbed my bag and left the restaurant. It never struck me to turn and see the expression Risa had as she watched me leave.

There was something that required me to take my leave.

The text had simply read, “I got in too.”

And that was why I had to go to the residence of the sender of that text.

—That is, Natsuki.

There was something that I wanted to tell her, should we both be admitted into the school.

At this point I sent a text to my brother. Earlier, I’d discussed with him what I was about to do.

“You’ll be fine. Move forward and don’t lose your way.”

I had my brother’s seal of approval.

I have all of his weight behind me, I thought.

My home was in a town called Hachiougi that was a one hour train ride from the inner city. It was neither in the coastal nor mountainous area; just some little rural town nestled in the suburbs. The center of Hachiougi life was Hachiougi Station.

The appointed meeting place with Natsuki was the Hachiougi Station concourse. On either side of the tracks was an overpass going north-south that had been turned into a concourse, and in the middle was a fountain and bench

that was often used as a meeting place.

It was about a ten-minute walk from my place to the station.

It was the path that I would be using for my commute to my high school.

After crossing the intersection I went up the stairs that led to the station interior. Since the station had just been remodeled, all of the equipment were of the newest models. Finally, there was some beautiful stained glass embedded at the foot of the stairs.

Before the station's transformation, in order to get from the north side to the south side, one needed to travel down a narrow underground passageway; now, since there was an area for the ticket turnstiles on the second floor, one could simply cross the concourse from one side to the other.

The station was busy. For a weekday afternoon, it was quite the crowd.

My anxiety swelled in the bustling throng of people. Deep breaths. You have to calm down. Aim for perfection.

I slipped a coin into the drink vending machine in the middle of the concourse. Rather, I tried, and fumbled the coin. With a clink, the coin rolled underneath the machine.

Deep breaths. This was not the time to get excited over nothing. I mean, it's just a hundred yen.

I should at least actually insert a coin, and get my black coffee.

I let out a sigh and raised the can to my lips.

I made my way slowly to the fountain. Natsuki wasn't here yet.

A sudden cold wind swept the concourse. It was still early March, after all.

As the appointed time of 3 o'clock approached, I could see Natsuki making her way towards me. The way her hands were stuffed in the pockets of her coat, and how she fixed her gaze on the ground revealed that she was not enjoying the cold.

"Natsuki!"

She raised her head. Having spent the entirety of our middle school years

together, somewhere along the line we had started calling each other by our given names.

“Oh, it’s Yuuto! Congrats on getting into high school!”

“Ah, yeah. You too, Natsuki.”

“Thanks! ...We’ll be together again in high school, then.”

The fact that Natuski, too, had noticed that we had been friends ever since elementary school raised my bliss to uncontainable heights.

“Too bad. Must be fate.”

“I’m glad that Shuu got in too.”

“Shuu’s got brains, ‘course he got in.”

“Yuuto, you settled on Karima High School in the end, huh?”

“Nothing I could do about it, the teacher told me that I’d never get into Kuwahara East.”

There wasn’t any chance I could admit that I’d only applied there so we could all get in together.

“Oh. Well, it all turned out okay, right? Yuuto, you’re the only who’s gone to the same school with me all the way from elementary school.”

Ah, so Natsuki thinks of me in a special way, probably. This is what they’d call a “match made in heaven”, I’d say.

Now, for someone who was aiming for perfection, the goal was not going to high school with her per se, but in this case, it was an important prerequisite. After all, I should be able to redo in case I had a hard time getting into college, and more importantly, I should work on having a perfect high school life with Natsuki and the others. This much I understood.

Once Natsuki had seated herself on the bench, I moved to do the same. We sat, staring in the general direction of the ticket turnstiles.

The people who passed through the turnstiles were swallowed up by the stairway heading to the platforms. In the opposite direction came those who hurried off the train and up the steps—salarymen, housewives carrying shopping bags, elementary-and middle-schoolers on the way home from school, young office ladies clutching their large suitcases. A young couple, on their way to have

some fun. There really was an extraordinary variety of people who used the station.

Time passed as we gazed at the turnstiles.

What was Natsuki thinking? Was it maybe the same thing I was thinking?

My butt kind of started itching, and my heart began beating faster.

If Natsuki stood and left, all of my chances would be lost. My perfect plan would crumble.

I breathed slowly three times, and opened my mouth.

“Um...”

“Hm?”

“Um, well, Natsuki...I like you.”

I said it. Somehow.

No matter how much one practices, confessions are nerve-wracking. Ask anyone from any number of thousand years ago or whatever, they'll say the same thing.

Natsuki swung her legs a little and gathered her courage, then stood up from the bench. She pivoted, her gaze turning from the turnstiles to meet mine.

“Yuuto, I consider you a very good friend of mine. We've been together since elementary school, all the way up to taking high school entrance tests together. I don't want what I say to be misconstrued in any way, or make you think anything about me that's not true, so I won't mince my words. I'm sorry. —I could never go out with you, Yuuto.”

Could never... Could never go out with me...

Those were words I had never imagined I would hear.

Just seconds ago I had been racking up points in the game of life. I thought I was well on my way to perfection.

“Sorry, there's somewhere I have to go.”

Natsuki rose from the bench and picked up her bag, then walked towards the south exit.

I couldn't bring myself to run after her. After all, it was useless, I thought.

The sound of her footsteps was swept into the wind. The breeze that had moments ago carried hints of spring and good thoughts now pierced through my clothing with a chill.

After that first confession, there was nothing I could do.

15 minutes after the heartbreaking confession. Location, the family restaurant in front of Hachiougi Station.

I had a four-person booth to myself. On the table were drinks, a hamburger entree, a Japanese-style mushroom doria, a margherita pizza, and a Suzuki grilled fish set. Simply put, I was binge eating. Well, even complexly put, I guess there was no other way to describe my current state other than "binge eating". Even a stranger, simply by looking at that table, could tell that I was binge eating—that was simply how truly and irrevocably obvious my binge eating was.

Simple, I thought.

I had confessed to the childhood friend whom I had liked for so long, and had gotten rejected. This was the simple act of binge eating to distract me from the pain.

...As if I could ever just be distracted from that pain.

I had thought that I was racking up points in this run. I'd had little slip-ups, sure, but no big failures. So naturally, I had thought that my confession would go smoothly as well.

I stabbed my fork into the yolk of the sunny-side-up eggs on top of my hamburger, dragging the tips of the prongs around in the yolk that bled out and changed color as it mixed into the meat sauce. Then I pushed the meat around in that and ate it.

So delicious. And bitter. And painful.

I was trying to calm myself down, but my stomach was having a riot. Just maybe, now that my stomach was full, if I confessed again she would change her mind. Since it's not like her lack of affection for me was written all over her face.

Nah, who am I kidding, she said "I could never go out with you," didn't she?

That was fact of the matter.

Hm...wait.

The hand holding my fork stopped in mid-bite. The thought popped into my mind—maybe, just maybe...

Natsuki saw me as someone special. That much was clear. She'd said herself that I was the only one who had been by her side all the way from elementary school. And we had even studied for school entrance exams together.

Naturally, she would have had some fantasies. Like, what if I were to become her boyfriend.

In that way, she had come to the conclusion that she "could never." Well, maybe my problem was something that happened before she formed that conclusion.

Anyway, it was possible.

So wouldn't that mean that I had a one in a hundred, one in a thousand, one in three thousand chance of success?

And given that there is some chance, wouldn't that mean that if I were to try again and again and again, eventually I would get an OK?

A reset was something that selected one other possibility out of all of the possibilities available. I wouldn't be able to pull this off on my own, but since there was that possibility, I'd expect that somehow down the line, my wish would come true.

I pulled the reset button from my bag, and pressed it without hesitation.

—Reset. The world wavered.

After confirming my acceptance into high school, I made a beeline for the station concourse.

I sat on the bench, waiting for Natsuki. What should I do? How should I confess so as not to be rejected?

I ran through my options in my head, and with my words still flying around in

my mind, I spotted Natsuki approaching and ran towards her.

“Natsuki!”

“Wh-what?”

Natsuki’s reaction to my rapid and unexpected approach was to take a few steps back.

“I like you, Natsuki!”

“Eh? Eh? Eh...um...sorry. I could never go out with you, Yuuto.”

—Reset. The world wavered.

“Natsuki, I want you to calm down and listen to me.”

“Okay.”

“I like you a lot.”

“...Sorry. I don’t think I could ever go out with you.”

—Reset.

I dived into the fountain. With water dripping from my hair and everyone’s gaze on me, I turned to Natsuki and shouted,

“I really like you!!”

“Sorry, I can’t go out with you.”

—Reset.

I bought a bunch of carnations at the flower stand in the concourse.

“Natsuki, you are more beautiful than these flowers. I want to go out with you.”

“Sorry, I could never go out with you.”

—Reset.

I made my move directly from the front. Grabbing both of Natsuki’s hands in my own, I said in a low voice,

“I love you. Go out with me.”

“No, I can’t do that.”

Reset.

“Natsuki!”

“Sorry!”

—Reset.

—Reset.

—Reset. Reset.

—Reset. Reset. Reset.

—Reset. Reset. Reset.

.....Reset.....Reset.....

Even on the 3000th confession, the answer was still “I could never go out with you.”

There was just the immutable fact that there was a vast chasm between us that I could never cross, no matter how gallantly I tried.

In other words,

“I’m not her type.”

Not her type...not her type, huh...

That’s how it was.

Once again, I sat in the family restaurant, binge eating.

Three thousand times, thirty thousand times, no matter how many times I tried, nothing would change the fact that I was not her type.

I pierced the Suzuki grilled fish set violently with my fork. I knew it was rude, but I was just so tired of everything. I deftly separated a bite of the white flesh

with the tips of my fork and was just about to shovel it into my mouth.

"Will you wish?"

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"These are the memories you have lost."

Forgotten? Impossible.

She held the stack between her thumb and forefinger. It was easily as thick as five regular 52-card decks combined.

—

Chapter 2: Even On the 3000th Confession

Part 2

I hadn't heard that voice in a long time. As the face that it belonged to popped into view, the world changed once again into monochrome, and Maki-chan appeared on the seat across from me.

"Hmm, isn't this kind of too many wishes?"

Maki-chan propped her chin onto her hands, peering at me with an exasperated look in her eyes.

"Did you see all that?""The whole thing."

Dejected, I continued shoving Suzuki fish into my face. Since the taste was strong, I shoved some rice in along with it.

"Fhy hanchu jhus rheefbe awwon?""Huh?"

My words couldn't make it out of my mouth, what with how stuffed with food it was. I swallowed it down with the help of some water and spoke.

"I said, why can't you just leave me alone?""Now now, I came all the way here because I was worried about you. No need to be so cold about it."

Maki-chan pursed her lips in displeasure, then reached over and plucked a french fry from my plate, eating it with only her front teeth.

"Hey, don't take my food without asking. ""Calm down, it's just a fry or two." "I thought I could get a perfect life with just a reset or two, y'know. And no matter how many times I did it, certain things just

remained impossible. With this I'll never have my perfect life. You gotta lend me a hand here." "Just because your life is reset doesn't necessarily mean that others' hearts are reset." "Yeah, I know. Well, I realized that... But isn't it possible that within the infinite possibilities, there's at least one chance of success? Can't you give me a hint to, you know, find the correct choice to make?"

Uh-uh, murmured Maki-chan, as she folded her arms. Of course, she still took a fry. Defeated, I pushed the fries plate towards her.

"The possibilities are infinite, yes, but the chances you get are limited."

Maki-chan looked as if she were struggling over choosing between talking to me and eating fries. She munched on them, deep in thought, occasionally nodding her head to show how delicious they were. It pissed me off.

"Yuuto, I think you ought to think a little more before making your decisions." "The hell, are you saying that I don't think before making them?" "Well, kinda. Anyway, can't be helped. You made a wish as strong as that time you shit yourself and wanted to start all over, so..." "Stop talking about that! Not to mention, I'm eating here!"

It was kind of annoying that Maki-chan had to be the one person in the universe who knew about my shitting my pants.

"Yuuto, I told you this once before, but you know, resetting your life is essentially nothing more than switching out your memories. Don't forget that." "And when I asked about what happened to my memories, you told me that nothing about them would change, that I wouldn't forget." "It's not like I know exactly what's going to happen to you. If you just use that thing willy-nilly, it might run out just when you need it, you know?" "Hey, I'm looking towards the future here. The past exists in order to make the future perfect. So if we must sacrifice the past for the sake of the future, then so be it. I've been perfect up until now, and must maintain this tidiness."

Without warning, Maki-chan clasped her hands together and raised them above her head, then brought them down upon the table's surface. The table split cleanly in two, and from the resulting crack erupted countless cards. Was this another magic show of my memories? She moved her hands around in the air, deftly puppeteering the cards, fanning them out in midair. She singled out one of the cards, moving it into the path of a stream of light coming from the window.

"Do you remember this?"

It depicted me from my elementary school days.

There I was, on the verge of tears, because I couldn't finish the carrots in my school lunch. I guess I had to finish my lunch before going to play. Then, elementary school Natsuki came by and ate my carrots for me, and we played together in the school yard for the rest of lunch break with some other classmates. We looked so happy.

"You remember?" "Whether I remember or not, this is weird. This never could have happened. I was never bad at eating carrots. I ate them like any normal kid. I'd never leave them in my school lunch. I mean, sure, back then it took me a long time to eat lunch. But I ate everything like I was supposed to and then went and played with everyone."

Maki-chan gave a defeated sigh, and gathered up all of the cards, assembling them neatly into a deck

and setting it on the table.

"These are the memories you have lost."

She turned the cards around, making the thickness of the stack apparent. "It's already this many, you know? You've already lost this many memories."

Forgotten? Impossible.

She held the stack between her thumb and forefinger. It was easily as thick as five regular 52-card decks combined.

"What do you mean, forgot? I haven't changed at all, right?"

I tried to remember if I had forgotten anything. If I really had been bad at eating carrots when I was little, and had been helped by Natsuki, if all that had really and truly happened, I ought to at least have a sliver of memory of that.

But no matter how hard I wracked my brains, not even the smallest fragment of recollection came to mind.

I snatched the cards from Maki-chan's hand and held them up, one by one, to the light. Yes, the person in the cards was certainly myself, but it was as if I were looking at a totally different person; a Yuuto I never knew doing things I never did. There wasn't a single card that rang a bell.

Maybe, while I had been aiming straight for perfection, and going on about how the future was important, I had done some things with consequences that could not be undone—

"You're not exactly wrong about that. However, the choices you make are just as important as the memories you've lost. When the time comes for you to make a truly important decision, take care not to take a path you'll regret."

Maki-chan lectured me while eating another fry. At some point, she had added parsley to the fries, making them a little more charming. She put her hands together and prayed,

"Thank you for the food..."

Was it appropriate for her to be so reverent in a place like this?

"What you wished for was to "do it over," and I merely granted that wish. The button is the tool you use to that end, but the one that decides whether your resets allow you to move on or stay stuck in a rut forever is you, Yuuto."

Maki-chan took her cards back from me and shuffled them in a magnificent show of dexterity, then clapped her hands together once. The stack of cards vanished into thin air.

"Yuuto, do you really wish for it?""Yes, I do." "Really? Then, will you move on, or stay stuck?"

Is the axe you dropped a golden axe, or a silver one? Or was it...?

I had to make a choice. To move on or to stay. I had to decide what I would wish, what I would give up on, what I wanted to receive, what I would cast aside.

"Maki-chan, you..."

"Hey, look outside. A brand new choice has opened up for you."

Hearing this, I turned my head to the monochrome world outside. Just as I let my gaze take in the world, it returned back to its old colorful self. I turned back around quickly, but Maki-chan had already vanished.

What did she mean by "choice"? While I mulled it over, I took another peek at the outside world. There was nothing strange about it...no, wait, this was weird. The station shutters were closed.

The newly-renovated Hachiougi Station's concourse area was also meant to serve as an evacuation site in case of emergency. People would evacuate to the site, and the shutters on the north and south gates would close.

I saw people huddled behind the shutters. A fire, perhaps? No, there was no smoke anywhere.

Seconds later, a fire truck and police car drove up and parked in front of the station, sirens shrieking. However, the shutters showed no sign of opening, and the firemen showed no intention of entering the station.

I stopped an employee of the restaurant as he walked by my table and asked him what was going on, but he, too, was completely out of the loop.

No doubt, something had happened, but what? I couldn't figure it out.

My phone buzzed, notifying me of a new text. It was the girl who had just left me...well, we weren't even dating, so you could hardly call that "leaving"...okay, that's not the type of "left" I meant in the first place—it was Natsuki.

Subject: looks like we're trapped in here

The shutters suddenly closed, and everyone's stuck in the concourse. Are you outside?

I thought it'd be faster to talk to her directly, so I dialed her number, but the call wouldn't connect. I had no choice but to reply by text.

"I'm outside. It's a real commotion out here. The police are here but they don't seem to be able to get inside."

Natsuki may have just rejected me, but she was still important to me. I might be able to help somehow, I thought, and headed towards the station.

I paid my bill, and the second I was out the door, I was engulfed by the mob of people. I slowly weaved my way through the crowd towards the station, only to be stopped by the police.

“My friend’s in there.”

“The police and firemen are currently doing their best to control the situation. Please step back.”

Meekly stepping back when told to by the police made me frustrated, but I pulled out from the crowd.

There had to be some other way to get to Natsuki.

There was a high wall between me and the concourse, and I didn’t think I’d be able to make it over. In order to make it inside the station, I’d have to walk along the old train tracks that led inside.

That, of course, was absurd.

An announcement blared over the crowd, “Due to a problem that has occurred at Hachiougi Station, we are postponing all traffic activity.”

“This is my only chance!”

Some biting feeling in the back of my mind spurred me to gather my energy and shout that out. Somehow, I had to get inside that concourse. Aware of the impossibility of the task before me, I walked towards the railroad crossing.

Natsuki was special to me.

It was back in fourth grade. When I wasn’t yet bullied by my classmates, when the divide between the girls and boys wasn’t quite so strong. I was playing with Natsuki and bunch of our friends after school.

That was the day that we met “that boy”.

All of us had been engrossed in playing hide-and-seek until the bell** signaled for us to go home. The other kids left, one by one, until it was just Natsuki and me.

“Let’s go home with the crows.”

Natsuki hummed that part of the song.

Down on the sports field was the baseball team, still practicing. They were under adult supervision, so we couldn't just go down there and talk to them. As for the people left in the schoolyard, other than Natsuki and me, there were only a little boy playing by himself and an old man who was for some reason sitting on the swings.

The atmosphere was getting kind of awkward with only us around, so I nudged Natsuki to get going home. That was when the old man on the swings beckoned towards me. He seemed suspicious yet kind of caring, and was dressed like a father on his day off—maybe like a teacher, you could say—and so Natsuki and I were drawn towards him.

"Could you play with that child, please," he said, and pointed to the little boy. He then drew two bars of chocolate from his briefcase.

"I'm his dad, but I don't know how to play with him."

We accepted the chocolate without a single shred of suspicion, and approached the boy.

"What grade are you in?"

"Second. What do you want?"

he answered, as he picked up the stones in the schoolyard, examined them, and piled them up. We learned that his name was Takeru.

Natsuki squatted down next to him.

"Takeru-kun, what are you doing?"

"Researching."

"Oh, I see."

We had been told to play with him, but all that happened was that Takeru continued playing by himself, Natsuki talked to him, and I loitered around aimlessly. I didn't notice when, but at some point the old man got up and left.

Eventually, a teacher came around and told us to go home. We responded with an "Okaay~" in a goody-two-shoes kind of tone. It was getting dark, and I was already itching to go home for real.

“But what do we do with Takeru-kun? Where did his dad go?”

“He went home. Anyway, if we don’t go home both of our parents will get mad.”

“We can’t just leave him here.”

As we discussed his fate, Takeru completely ignored us.

“Did you play with Takeru?”

Some old man I had never seen came up to us. He was of roughly the same stature as the other one, but even in the fading light I could tell that this was not Takeru’s father.

“Who are you?”

“I came to get Takeru. Let’s go.”

“No!”

Takeru retorted while piling up stones. “Do you know him?” we asked. “My uncle,” he answered.

“Let’s go home, Takeru.”

“Don’t wanna.”

He’s trying to kidnap him, I thought immediately.

“Takeru, run!”

I took hold of Takeru’s arm and fled.

I yelled to Natsuki, “Look for his dad!”

Of course, the old man chased after Takeru and me. Since he was an adult, he was much faster, but we knew the schoolyard like the backs of our hands. Using all of the back alleys and hidden paths, we evaded him.

But we had our limits. Near the west entrance, the old man seized my arm.

“Takeru, come here.”

“Don’t do it! Run away!”

The old man shoved me aside, and grabbed onto Takeru. He was getting away with him!

It was then that Natsuki came flying in with a “Hiya!!” and tackled the old man. Behind her was Takeru’s father.

As I lay there on the ground, Natsuki offered her hand, asking if I was alright.

Wow, I thought. Natsuki was like a messiah to me. She may have panicked in a tough situation, but she had the courage to deliver a full-body attack to a grown man.

Natsuki was amazing!

She would surely become a perfect person one day.

Back then, I had already started yearning for my brother's qualities of "perfection" and "tidiness". I thought, I should strive to be like her, too.

She was the same kind of person as me.

She was facing the same kind of future as I was.

From that day on, Sugita Natsuki was, to me, a very special person indeed.

I was so unbearably worried about Natsuki, I ran at full speed to the railroad crossing, but when I got there, there was no one else. They had all probably gone to the station to spectate. Once I was at the crossing, following the tracks was an easy matter; getting onto the platform would be another story.

Because of all of the commotion, the trains were stopped.

I walked along the ditch that ran parallel to the tracks for a while, and spotted up some passengers on the platform up ahead. Someone called out to me,

"Did you get here from the tracks?"

Everyone turned towards me.

"From the railroad crossing, actually. I was trying to see if I could get into the concourse this way..."

Hands reached down from the platform and helped me up.

"There's no way to get in from here."

Wondering why, I went down the stairs to investigate, and understood immediately. The junction between the concourse and the stairs was blocked by the shutters. The button to open the shutters on my side didn't work when I tried pressing it.

The concourse was well and truly sealed off.

I looked around for a way to open the shutter. It seemed that rather than trying to open the giant shutter on the North-South entrances, the 2-meter-wide shutter by the stairs would be easier.

However, the things on the platform, like chairs and trash cans, were all affixed sturdily to the ground, and there was nothing with which I could get up and open the shutter.

Boom.

A huge crash shook the building.

Reflexively, I ducked down and covered my head.

The shutter started rattling. I heard the sound of metal crashing against metal.

That was an explosion inside!

Boom. Boom.

As the explosions resounded, the fire alert system started going mad. The explosion must have caused a fire. The people on the platform jumped down onto the tracks and started heading towards the railroad crossing.

This was getting more dangerous by the second.

There wasn't much time left.

I was worried about Natsuki.

I felt the shutter with my hand to make sure it wasn't hot, then pressed my ear to it. I could hear faint screams behind the iron shutter. The sound of running. Were they trying to escape? My ears were met with the sound of another explosion.

"Natsuki!"

I took a few steps back. Lowering my head, I went into a run, and tackled the shutter with everything I had. It clanged noisily, but that was all. Smoke was trickling out from the bottom of the shutter. There was definitely something terrible going on in there.

Once again, I drew back, and threw myself against the shutter. Again, my

fruitless efforts drew forth nothing but noise.

I bent down near where the smoke was coming out, and was choked back by the smoke, tears stinging at my eyes.

Natsuki...

Ah, yes. Reset, I just have to reset...

However, I'd learned from my experience thus far that just resetting recklessly without figuring out how to fix the train situation would just result in the same ending. There was no point in resetting now if I didn't take the time to figure out when exactly I should return to and what to do there.

I was about to give up when I heard a *click*.

Eh? I thought, and looked up. The shutter was slowly sliding up. Smoke billowed out from from the opening. I crawled, coughing, up the stairs.

The entrance at the ticket gates was thick with smoke, but I could tell that it was clearing out steadily. The main shutter at the concourse was open as well.

The firefighting team poured in from the main shutter.

"Natsuki! Natsuki! Where are you?" I yelled.

The inside of the station was in a sorry state. There were signs of explosion scattered around the area, and the showcase window of the station stores were shattered in some places. I could see signs that someone had used a fire extinguisher. I was relieved to see that the fires had all been put out.

All of the people were heading towards the exit.

I maneuvered my way through the river of people, looking for Natsuki.

"Yuuto!"

I felt a hand on my arm and glanced over my shoulder. It was Natsuki. She was talking to me like she always had! Yes, even in this kind of situation I was still pretty worried that the failed confession had ruined our friendship.

"Natsuki, you're not hurt, are you?"

Natsuki's uniform was all white on the right side, but otherwise, she seemed unharmed.

"I'm fine! Oh, that's from when I was trying to use the fire extinguisher. I wasn't sure how to use it at first, so I ended up getting it all over myself. It's got a pretty powerful blast."

"Why did you end up with the fire extinguisher?"

"There was an explosion near me, and a fire broke out. I was surrounded by little kids, so..."

"That's really risky."

"Well...a superhero would rescue the kids."

"Yes, that's true. That really is something you would say."

The superhero-loving Natsuki would definitely do whatever a hero would do in her place.

"Don't tell anyone about this, okay?"

She stuck her tongue out at me.

I wouldn't really have minded, but I guess she didn't want others to know she was such a superhero otaku.

There were some things that didn't quite make sense, and as time went on, the more they bothered me. Had the shutter just happened to close, or was it all planned out by someone? And if it were just an accident, then how did it get closed shut in the first place? The news had mentioned that problem, too.

That night, I sent a message to Natsuki.

"Everyone's been talking about the incident, huh."

"Yeah. If I tell my friends that I was there, they'll pester me to tell them the details."

Hooray, Natsuki was speaking to me as she usually did.

I had realized after 3000 confessions that I was, romantically speaking, not her type after all. Regardless, I still wanted her to know that I liked her.

That's why I chose not to reset to before the confession.

It's fine to just get rejected and continue on with our high school lives, isn't it?

Those were my thoughts.

"Well, I'm glad you weren't hurt."

"Thanks."

That 'thanks' could mean a thousand different things.

I was fine with that, I told myself, as I closed my eyes and drifted off to sleep.

One more thing I want to say about this day.

I had told my brother everything about that day's events. The fact that though my confession had been a failure, I was still friends with Natsuki. And everything that happened at the station.

"So you weren't physically at the scene, right, Yuuto?"

"By the time I managed to get inside, it was all over."

"I see... I'm glad that you two weren't hurt."

"Yeah, me too."

Even though my brother was so far away, he was still watching over me as I aimed for perfection and tidiness.

I chased after my brother. Even though he was far away, though I couldn't see him. He continued to be my perfect and tidy goal.

I should try to get into the college that he's attending.

I decided then and there that I would go to Karima High.



Today is our wonderful graduation ♪

I made up a little jingle on the spot.

The three of us were finally leaving the nest, so to speak.

Shuu was unexpectedly popular among the younger students, so a bunch of girls came clamoring up to him asking for his button**, but he refused them all.

For memories' sake, I had prepared my button and put it in my pocket, but no one asked me for it.

So was that how it was? —I felt a twinge of regret. But not enough regret to reset.

“Yuuto, let’s take a photo!”

Natsuki called out to me. Just for today they let everyone have their cellphones out**, since people would want to commemorate with pictures.

Natsuki, Shuu, and I stood together and had our pictures taken together, with each of our cellphones. It would have been fine to take one photo and send it to the others, but that was too much of a hassle.

I wouldn’t mind living this moment over countless times.

The photo inside my phone had the most joyful expressions I had ever seen the three of us wear.

We were going to the same high school.

A wonderful high school life was surely awaiting us. I felt my expectations growing.

I had no doubts that I would have a brilliant time in high school.

—

Notes:

** This refers to the song Yuuyake Koyake (aka Kaien Panzermast), which is played at 5 PM in some cities in Japan to tell the children that it is time to go home. One of the lines is “Let’s go home with the crows”.

**There is a tradition for a graduating male to give his second-from-the-top button on their uniform to the girl he likes (since it’s the button closest to the heart)

**In Japan, the rules against merely having phones, iPods, cameras etc. at school are very very very strict and they will usually be confiscated. So letting kids use their phones is a big deal.

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Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 3: Whatever Happens, I'll Just Reset - Pt. 1

[PANDORA VOXX novels masterpost](#)

[← Ch. 2 Pt. 2](#) ♦ [Ch. 3 Pt. 2 →](#)

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When I went over to help out, I found that everyone on cleaning duty was female, making me the lone male among them.

"Hashidate-kun, can I have that?"

"Hashidate-kun, move the desk for me please?"

"Hashidate-kun, help—"

It was heaven.

—

Chapter 3: Whatever Happens, I'll Just Reset

Part 1

Shuu joined the baseball team.

Well, the baseball club members were the stars of Karima High.

Our school went to a regional tournament, unrelated to Koushien**, about three times a year to play. Apparently we were pretty strong.

When I asked Shuu why he had entered the baseball team, he answered,

"Because the baseball team has a lot of rivals."

Since baseball was popular, there were a lot of players fighting for positions, and therefore a lot of rivals. The more rivals there were, the more motivation he had. That's the kind of person he was.

"On the other hand, Yuuto, you have no motivation. Remember in the long-distance race in elementary school, you placed ahead of me?"

"Not true, I do have motivation. It's just that running track has no place in my goals for perfection."

"What is this 'goal of perfection' you speak of anyway? Doing nothing?"

"I'm doing something."

"But you're not doing it with your all."

He was perceptive.

As someone who always put his all into everything, Shuu could tell that I had effort to spare.

Because I had the reset button, I could reset every time I encountered failure, and thus the people around me saw only the perfect side of me. So, naturally, they would think that everything came effortlessly to me.

I wonder what Shuu would think if he were to find out my secret. Maybe he'd look at me with scorn.

The time I spent idling around and chatting with Shuu had decreased considerably ever since he joined the baseball team.

I walked home alone.

Natsuki was on the girl's volleyball team. I really thought she was the type to join the drama club, so it came as a bit of a shock. After all, she was uncharacteristically fond of superheroes. The other guys probably only noticed her cheerful personality and would never consider the possibility that she was an otaku, and even if they knew, their first guess would probably be that she liked anime or manga.

"Natsuki, why didn't you join the literary club?"

Natsuki, Shuu, and I were all in the same class.

"I thought of joining literary club, but most of the things you do there can be done at home, wouldn't you say? So I thought it'd be better to do something that I can only do at school."

"Then why volleyball? Why not basketball? And I heard they're starting a girl's soccer team this year, too."

"Don't tell anyone this, but it's because the volleyball team's weak. Even though they practice, they're weak. The basketball team places pretty well at regionals."

There's a lot of demand for a soccer team, so they're bound to have a lot of good players."

"So what?"

"So I chose the volleyball team, the one with a promising future."

"What promising future?"

"Well, it might have one, okay? I was thinking, if I tried really hard, I could get the volleyball team stronger and stronger."

As expected, she was following the path of the superhero. She was so cool.

That's why Natsuki stayed after school practicing with the volleyball team until dusk every day.

At our school, there were some days with no club, and so when classes ended, everyone rushed home. To me and the others in the going-home club, being able to go home without doing club activities was kind of a privilege, but the world saw it differently. Those who were in clubs were the special and privileged.

It shocked me.

I had only been in high school for a short time, and I was trying to just slide by without losing my stoic countenance, yet I was shocked by this.

"Yuuto, you going home?" Natsuki asked.

It was a no-club day.

"Yeah, I am. I always do."

"Help me with the cleaning."

"Ehh."

"C'mon please, help?"

Natsuki had a habit of putting a rising inflection in her voice when asking for something. I don't know if it was just a habit or if it was on purpose, but regardless, it was a particular weakness of mine. I didn't confess to her three thousand times for the fun of it, you know.

"Well, I guess."

"You're great, Yuuto!"

When I went over to help out, I found that everyone on cleaning duty was

female, making me the lone male among them.

“Hashidate-kun, can I have that?”

“Hashidate-kun, move the desk for me please?”

“Hashidate-kun, help—”

It was heaven.

This was my kind of helping-out-with-cleaning. By the way, in high school, all the guys were just called -kun, without any sort of embarrassment. There wasn’t any honorific-dropping, either. Of course, we still called the girls by -san.

We were such adults.

“All we have left is to take out the trash. Yuuto, lend a hand.”

“Now I’m just doing everything for you guys.”

Natsuki and I, along with two others, picked up the trash can and headed towards the incinerator. Said incinerator was down in a corner of the sports grounds, so the shortest way was to go behind the sports shed.

The baseball and rugby teams were both on the grounds, practicing. Only the second-and third-years of the baseball team were there; I didn’t see Shuu among them.

Natsuki and I walked side-by-side, gripping the trash can. I thought perhaps she would tease me about all of the girls being cutesy around me during cleaning, but of course, as a man whose confession had just been rejected, I hoped that it wouldn’t happen. While we talked about nothing in particular, we walked towards the sports storage shed and noticed that the door was open about 50 cm.

At first I thought someone might have forgotten to close it, but seeing as the teams who were out on the field right now were the “Great Teams” themselves, I decided to just let sleeping dogs lie, and was about to walk past the shed.

“Fujiyoshi-kun...do you have a girlfriend?”

I heard an uneasy voice coming from inside the shed. A girl, talking to Shuu, no less.

“Nope.”

"Then please go out with me!"

"...Sorry."

"Why not?"

"I'm not interested."

"You...you think that badly of me?"

"That's not what I meant. I'm just not interested in being in a relationship right now."

"That's so..."

I could hear the sound of a girl crying from inside the shed.

"Don't cry. Dry your tears and find strength in yourself."

Shuu... You really are a manly guy, a man among men. But that's not something you should be saying to a girl who just now confessed and was rejected. Especially if you're the one who did it.

I could never decide if he was really cool or just lame.

Natsuki gave me a push on the back, steering me away from the shed.

"That girl was the baseball club's manager, you know."

"Really? A first-year? Making a move on Shuu?"

"You didn't know about it? She's been trying to hint her feelings at him for a while, or so the rumors claim."

"I didn't know. Shuu never told me."

"Of course not, if he did, that would be like bragging, right? And you know how dense our Shuu is."

"Yeah, you're right."

"...So Shuu doesn't have a girlfriend then."

"He doesn't. That thing about him not being interested was true, huh."

"Hmmm."

I had the feeling that her "Hmmm" had a lot more to it, but I ignored that and dumped the paper trash into the incinerator.



After I arrived home, I collapsed onto my bed and held the reset button up to the fluorescent light.

Not like I could enlighten myself to its true nature at this point.

I turned the box around in my hand.

Why had Maki-chan given this reset button to me?

I had used this button to reset my life thousands of times by now. I tried to recall all of those memories. There was a certain subset that I could remember, but most of them were buried under layers and layers of memories.

I read in a book once that humans retain all of their memories from the time that they are born. There exists in the brain a certain region called the hippocampus, which is in charge of memory. It's a small part of the body but it plays a huge role.

So if all of my memories ever were stored there, then that must include memories from each time I reset. At least, all of my previous memories from my resets were stuffed in there somewhere.

...Huh?

The possibility entered my brain that by using the reset button, I was in effect extending my lifespan. Even just by resetting a number of times in a month, I would be living longer lives than the people around me, in a way. In fact, since I'd already reset several thousand times, I had probably lived 2 or 3 years longer than my peers. However, my body was still that of a first-year high school student. Maybe if I had the body of a third-year instead, I would have more of a tough vibe.

I had been thinking of it as a positive side effect of life extension, but what if I were actually piling up mental years? As I acquired more and more memories, my brain would be more strained by them, so I wouldn't be surprised if my brain were weakening.

No, wait a minute.

If I were really adding on mental years here, then I should be having no trouble in school at all. I'd probably be around the level of third year of high school, or even first year of college. If this hypothesis were correct, then I should in all probability be a genius who could go to college straight out of first year of high school...

Hmmm. What was actually going on here?

As I was pondering the true nature of the reset button and what effect it was having on my life, the scientific magazine that I had dropped by my bedside (yeah, as I had reset over and over, I'd eventually gotten into stuff like scientific magazines) flipped open to an article titled "Time Machines and Parallel Worlds". At that moment, my head started to hurt.

Aah, now I have a headache and I can hear ringing in my ears.

So that's how I ended up sleeping with my head buried in the futon.



The next night, Shuu called me. That in itself was unusual.

The first thing out of his mouth was,

"I've entered a relationship with Natsuki."

Seeing as I was already occupied by so many stressors, at first I couldn't think of what to say.

I had kept my confession to Natsuki on the day we were accepted into school a secret from Shuu this whole time.

More like, I was trying to pretend that had never happened.

I had thought that I could just have a wonderful high school life and continue to be friends with Natsuki.

—entered a relationship with Natsuki.

I completely ignored the fact that he was using such an old-fashioned phrase. His words tore straight through me.

"O-oh?"

Somehow I managed to squeak out a reply.

"She confessed to me."

"No way!"

It took a few moments for him to regain his composure after my unexpected outburst of shock, but then he laid out the events of the day's evening for me.

Today had been a club day, so as usual Shuu had stayed late after school to practice. Natsuki had done the same thing for her club, so they ended up bumping into each other as they set out to go home. Their houses were in the same direction, so they ended up walking home together.

Natsuki looked like she had something on her mind, and when questioned by Shuu, she had blurted out "I like you," apparently.

After thinking for a bit, Shuu had responded with an "Okay."

"B-but Shuu, didn't you say that you have no interest in that kind of stuff? "Hm? I don't recall ever saying that to you."

Memories from the conversation I overheard the day before yesterday flashed through my head.

"But it's true, right?" I retorted.

"Yeah, it is, but Natsuki's different."

"Different?"

"I've got mountains of things before me that I have to give my all to overcome. So as I see it, it'd be in my best interests not to be involved in love affairs. But if it's Natsuki, it's fine, I think."

"Why?"

"I imagined myself trying hard alongside Natsuki, and found it to be quite plausible."

Shuu and Natsuki were certainly the type to mutually inspire each other in both clubs and school.

And in that regard, Shuu's decision was certainly not out of line, and neither was Natsuki's analysis of the situation, and as their friend, I felt admiration for them.

I hung up and sat for a while in shock.

I could easily imagine Shuu and Natsuki trying their best alongside each other, but I could not for the life of me include myself along with them.

I took the reset button in my hand, and thought carefully.

The confession had been on the way home today, so then I should...

I applied pressure to the red button.

—Reset. The world wavered.



The point I had chosen to return to was lunch break of that same day.

I had Shuu come with me, to a place where there would be less chance of anyone seeing us. Underneath the stairs.

“Hey.”

“What.”

“I’ve been wanting to discuss this with you for some time now. Today felt like a good day to do it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Before we graduated from middle school, I confessed to Natsuki. She rejected me.”

“Rejected you? Why? You two get along, don’t you?”

“Being friends and going out are two very different things. I could never go out with you, she said.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“I thought you might be angry.”

“No, I think it’s ridiculous. I can’t imagine why’d she say no.”

“That’s good, I’m not asking you to be angry. I mean, I’m not angry either.”

“No, I’m angry, too. You should be more angry about this, not to mention have more faith in yourself as a man.”

“I do have faith in myself.”

“Then why don’t you at least try to make her give you a chance before walking away?”

“Would you do that if you were in my position?”

“Well, I have no interest in being in a relationship.”

“Really? What would you do if Natsuki confessed to you?”

“I’d say no. I have no interest in being in a relationship, and I can’t forgive the fact that she blew you off like that.”

“Hey, I’m doing just fine.”

“Okay, even ignoring what happened between you and her, I’d still refuse.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

That's how our secret conversation went.

We returned to the classroom in silence.

While looking down at those people with club activities, my club-activity-less self waited in the classroom until sundown. The wait was excruciating.

That's because I had waited here many times already. I had found, by trial-and-error via resets, the best timing for me to play my hand. Waiting was unavoidable.

This time was the same as all the others.

The bell rang, and everyone packed up to go home. Pretty soon, Natsuki would bump into Shuu, and they would head home together, and then Natsuki would confess to Shuu. And if all went well, the pieces of my grand scheme would fall into place...

I moved to a classroom on the first floor from which I could see the school gate, and peeked outside from the gap in between the drawn curtains.

I could see Shuu and Natsuki walking together, and exited the classroom so that I could follow them.

Leaving a bit of distance, I tailed them. After we had walked for about five minutes, Natsuki stopped. Shuu looked behind him, over his shoulder, and said something.

Smack!

All of a sudden, Natsuki slapped Shuu in the face.

I'm sure you know how I felt at the moment. All according to plan. Goal achieved. It was a shitty thing to do to Natsuki, but it was for the sake of my perfect life.

Natsuki ran the rest of the way home, crying. I looked at her silhouette retreat farther and farther away.

She'd be fine, since she was Natsuki. Tomorrow she'd be back to her old

cheerful self. Just like the time she rejected me, she would continue greeting us as she always did.

I watched Shuu head off to his own house, and then left.

That night, Natsuki was killed.



Notes:

**Koushien is the yearly baseball tournament in Japan and is really big deal.
Read more about it [here](#).

[Next part →](#)

Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 3: Whatever Happens, I'll Just Reset - Pt. 2

[PANDORA VOXX novels masterpost](#)

[← Ch. 3 Pt. 1](#) ♦ [Ch. 4 Pt. 1 →](#)

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"Before we graduated from middle school, I confessed to Natsuki. She rejected me."

"Rejected you? Why? You two get along, don't you?"

"Being friends and going out are two very different things. I could never go out with you, she said."

"That's ridiculous."

—

Chapter 3: Whatever Happens, I'll Just Reset

Part 2

Following the bell that signaled the beginning of the school day came a schoolwide announcement. The entire student body was urgently ushered to the gym.

We stood in rows, as if we were about to give our morning bows. The end of the line was still restlessly moving to and fro like an animal's tail when the school principal stepped onto the stage.

"We have an unfortunate announcement to make today. Some of you may already know this—first-year Sugita Natuski of Class B passed away last night. She was on her way home when she became involved in an incident. The perpetrator was taken into police custody this morning, so it is unlikely that the event will repeat itself. However, everyone should make sure to be careful, especially when walking alone at night. The media have already been alerted to this event. We ask that you all try not to involve yourselves with news reporters.

In honor of Natsuki's memory, it would be advisable not to speak lightly of the situation."

The gymnasium was so still, you could hear a pin drop.

We all walked back to our classrooms in silence, rather than the usual hubbub of chatter that usually accompanied the conclusion of school announcements. One by one, the girls started to cry, and the other girls comforted them.

Shuu and I said nothing and did not cry, but simply stared up at the ceiling in a daze.

I heard a voice from among the boys standing behind the classroom,

"It must have been a pervert. Or maybe, this was all a big prank, whaddaya think?"

I nearly leapt forward at the owner of the voice, but was forcibly held back by Shuu.

However, right after that, one of Natsuki's close friends slapped the guy in the face with all her might, and the tension in the air settled. If she hadn't slapped him, I wouldn't have been able to deal with the sulky atmosphere and would have taken him on myself.

That day, for homeroom, we discussed who would go to Natsuki's house to pay their respects.

Her family had requested to not have the entire class visit, so the class representative, along with Shuu and I were chosen to go. Since Shuu and I had known her since middle school, the class had no qualms about it, and besides, both of us fully intended to go, whether we were part of the class visit or not.

We visited that night for the vigil.

Shuu and I met up at a nearby convenience store, and set off to Natsuki's house. In middle school, Natsuki had refused to let us go to her house to study, but I never thought this was how I would get to finally go to her house with Shuu.

Natsuki's house was your average one-story building, with "Sugita family"

written in black ink on white paper at their front porch. There was hardly any evidence of people living there. It was, as my teacher had called it, a “vigil only in name”—only those who were close to the family were visiting, it seemed.

Natsuki was in the living room. She was dressed in her funeral clothes, with a cloth over her face, and for some reason there was a fur of some sort around her neck.

The other people in the room, who were probably her relatives, talked in low voices about the official autopsy and so on and so forth.

I couldn’t bring myself to look at Natsuki’s face. I had heard of people applying funeral makeup to the dead, and wondered if she had it on. Natsuki, who had never been one to seek out magic powders to make herself stand out, had not once worn makeup that actually made her look like she was wearing makeup, as far as I knew.

I still could not bring myself to look her mother in the eyes.

When we exited the house, Shuu spoke.

“There’s something that I have to tell you.”

“Don’t say it!”

“Natsuki’s death was my fault.”

“Don’t say that! It’s not true! At all!”

“It’s true. Yesterday, I...”

“Don’t say it!”

Please, don’t continue with that sentence. I knew what Shuu was thinking, what he wanted to tell me. And because I knew, I told him that it wasn’t true.

It was all my fault.

It was I who killed Natsuki.

What the hell, why did this have to happen? I never wanted any of this to happen. I never wished for it. So why did Natsuki bear the punishment?

This was a punishment for me, too.

I didn’t want to encounter this slim possibility. I refused to recognize this world. I didn’t *want* to recognize the existence of this world.

I mean, it didn't make sense. Natsuki had done nothing wrong. There was no reason to harbor any ill will towards her.

It wasn't her fault. It was all my fault.

I had reset solely for the sake of my ego, and look what happened.

I have to save her. I have to save Natsuki.

Destroy the root cause, and slice the starting point to pieces.

I could do it.

Rather, I was the only one who could do it.

Natsuki, Natsuki, Natsuki, Natsuki.

I opened my mouth to scream, but my throat was so dry that no sound came out. I took the reset button from my bag and pressed it with conviction.

—Reset.

Natsuki ran, crying, as I called out to her.

It was on the way home after school. Shuu and Natsuki had walked together after school, she had confessed and he had turned her down. And then this.

I broke into a run, chasing her. I had to save her.

As I passed Shuu, he looked at me with surprise.

He turned to me and said something that I couldn't hear.

I was trying my best to keep pace with Natsuki, but seeing as she ran a lot during club activities, while I sat around all day, we were of totally different calibers. After a while, I lost sight of her.

Fortunately, I knew where her house was (in fact, I had just gone there recently, for her own vigil) so I knew approximately which direction to go.

Even if I don't chase after her, I thought, I just have to be there in time to save her from danger. I continued, without slowing my pace, my feet pounding the asphalt.

As I passed by the park on the way to her house, I heard the sound of someone

falling, and a small scream.

Natsuki!

"Natsuki! Where are you?"

The park was triangular, nestled between the two paths that branched out from the fork in the road, and was surrounded by tall trees such that much of the park was in the shadows.

I pried apart some low-hanging branches and made my way into the park.

Where...where was she.

I saw the silhouette of a man behind the bench.

And he was on top of Natsuki!

The man had unkempt hair, and was wearing dirtied shirt and slacks. He looked like a homeless man who had nowhere but this park to spend his nights.

"That bastard!"

I jumped over the bench to the other side, and pressed my weight against the dirt-covered man's back. He twisted around and elbowed me in the side, hard. His reflexes were surprisingly fast.

Natsuki, who was still being held down by the man, made no attempt to flee.

"Natsuki, get away!"

As I shouted, the man punched me in the face. The impact was enough to make my head jerk back, but I grit my teeth against the pain, and lashed back with a headbutt.

He didn't even flinch. Glaring with bloodshot eyes, he moved to wrap his hands around my neck. I scraped my nails down his arms, and in the moment that he loosened his grip in response to the pain, I grabbed his leg.

He kicked at my chin with his knee. I couldn't breathe. With his foot, he kicked my stomach. Over and over, he kicked me.

Unable to stand it anymore, I collapsed facedown onto the ground. He continued to kick me in the gut, over and over again.

It hurt so much that I couldn't move. I can't. I can't. I can't. I can't...no, I have to save Natsuki.

The next kick connected with my face. My vision blurred to black. I couldn't see. My nose hurt. Half of my face was covered in spit and some other warm liquid, flowing across my skin. A nosebleed, maybe.

I tried to get up, but I couldn't. With great difficulty, I opened one eye.

The man had run back to Natsuki, once again obscuring her from sight.

She let out a scream.

I could hear the sound of the her uniform's blouse buttons being ripped apart.

I dug my fingers into the ground, and tried to use my elbow as support to lift myself off the ground, but collapsed.

I couldn't do anything. I had reset, but still couldn't save Natsuki.

Worthless. Powerless. Meaningless.

I reached inside my bag, which had been dropped near where I lay now, and felt around inside with my hand.

Where is it. Where is it.

Natsuki's voice, her voice...

Where was the button? I couldn't find it. It should be in the bag, I'm sure I put it in there.

Maybe I had forgotten to take it with me...I didn't want to think about that possibility.

The only thing I can do now is use that button—that is, reset.

Natsuki's scream!

The button...there it is!

I gathered all of my strength and pressed the button. Please, make it in time!

—Reset.

I returned to lunch break.

I made it, I think.

If I hadn't made it in time.....I don't want to think about that.

It's really fortunate that I have the reset button, I thought to myself, but the main event is about to begin.

During lunch break, I dragged Shuu off with me.

"Hey."

"What."

"I've been wanting to discuss this with you for some time now. Today felt like a good day to do it."

"What do you mean?"

"Before we graduated from middle school, I confessed to Natsuki. She rejected me."

"Rejected you? Why? You two get along, don't you?"

"Being friends and going out are two very different things. I could never go out with you, she said."

"That's ridiculous."

"Hold on, let me finish my story. I still think of Natsuki as a close friend. Shuu, you're an important friend to me too. I don't draw a line between guys and girls for this. You're both equally important to me. You think of Natsuki as a friend, too, don't you?"

"Yeah, I do. For a girl, she's an unusually good friend to have around."

"I think so too. And I thought you'd say that. Now, I confessed to Natsuki, and she turned me down. However, she's still special to me. Whether she's special to me as a girl or not, I don't know, but the important thing is, she's special to me as a friend."

"Yeah, I understand."

"I thought you would. I want to continue being friends with both you and Natsuki. Don't you?"

"I do too. I want to stay friends with both you and Natsuki."

"That's a relief."

"You sure are weird. What's up with you, suddenly bringing up this soap-opera-like conversation?"

"It doesn't matter, does it."

"Whatever...well, you're still weird."

And thus ended our secret conversation.

We returned to the classroom in silence.

School let out for the day.

Again, I killed time hanging around in the classroom, waiting for those two to finish their club activities.

I confirmed that Shuu and Natsuki were walking home together, and tailed them.

Up ahead, the two stood facing each other, talking. Natsuki reached out her hand and Shuu shook it.

I approached them, pretending not to have seen what had happened earlier.

"What's going on?"

Natsuki was crying. Tears were streaming down her face, but she was smiling.

"We were reaffirming our friendship."

"Don't say such embarrassing things."

"It's not embarrassing, Shuu. See, you reaffirmed our friendship too, right?"

"Don't keep saying that."

"Yuuto, you'll be friends with me forever, too, won't you?"

"Hm? What gotten into you all of a sudden? Of course I will."

"I'm glad. I'm glad that I'm friends with both of you. You're all I need."

"Natsuki, you weirdo."

"Yeah, weirdo."

"C'mon, what?"

Natsuki punched both Shuu and my chests with her fist, and I returned the favor, punching her lightly in the back.

The three of us stayed friends.

That was a good enough conclusion for me. After all, we were true friends. There was neither need nor desire to destroy the delicate balance between us... but if it were to be destroyed, that would certainly not be in my favor.

The three of us walked along, stopping at a convenience store to splurge on ice cream. It kind of felt like we were celebrating something. Then, we headed home on our usual routes, talking about nothing in particular.

With the life reset button, I could do anything.

I could go back to the time before I win a match and make it so that I would never meet with the losing team. I could even make it so that the match never happened.

Was this kind of life so bad?

—Might as well, right?

Let me give you a small example of this sort of trial and error to think about. Suppose you've just finished a can of juice and you're trying to throw the can into the garbage bin.

If you don't make it in, reset. If you do make it, that's the end of that. Eventually, you'll be able to throw the can in.

Moreover, in the course of resetting, your throwing arm will become better and better, and the chances of getting in will be higher each time. In fact, you could say that I could now throw cans into garbage bins with perfect accuracy.

Each time I reset, my life became more perfect. And at the same time, I myself also became more perfect. My life would be built up, bit by bit, from these repeats. As the bits of my life piled up, they would weigh upon me more and more.

Ah, my ears were ringing again. At the same time, it felt like there was an enormous weight pressing down on top of my head, following the ringing like a shadow.

Everything went hazy.

Everything started spinning.

The weight on my head and the ringing in my ears started to tingle and throb, and I felt pressure in the back of my chest.

What was happening to me?



It happened the next Saturday. Shuu and I went to the convenience store near Natsuki's house. Then we sat down on a concrete planter in the parking lot nearby, took out the manga magazines we had just bought, and started flipping through them.

We had considered inviting Natsuki to come with us, but the seinen manga that we read that day happened to be full of indecent scenes, so if she had seen us reading these kinds of manga...well, this was why we decided not to invite her along. Besides, this was a day for us guys to have fun by ourselves; it wasn't like the three of us were joined at the hip or anything.

Then, an old lady came hobbling out of the convenience store.

She was moving forward at a disconcertingly fast pace for her age, judging by the bend of her back. She was about to cross the road. The light was red, but there was no sign of any cars around, so she moved out onto the crosswalk.

Right then, because the fence of the residential area created a blind spot there, a motorbike came speeding around the corner, unaware of the three of us in the area.

It didn't even slow down as the old lady went flying.

Crack! It was an appallingly loud noise.

The rider hit the brakes, hard, and the bike finally screeched to a stop more than ten meters from where the collision had happened. The old lady lay on her back in the center of the parabola formed by the tire tracks in the convenience store parking lot.

Ah, she finally straightened her back.

As I thought these imprudent thoughts, I returned to my virtuous self and reached into my bag, pressing the button without hesitation.

—Reset.

The old lady came out of the convenience store and headed straight for the crosswalk. I put the manga magazine down and ran over to her, planting myself

between her and the crosswalk.

"The light's red, you know."

"What do you want, kid. There aren't any cars."

"Doesn't matter, just wait, please."

"Well, if no cars come, then what was all this for?"

I stood directly in front of the old lady, my arms outstretched to block her path.

"Step aside, don't get in the way!"

"Please wait!"

The sound of an engine revving was followed by a motorbike passing behind us so quickly that I felt pressure from behind me.

"See, it's dangerous."

"No matter. He would have obviously swerved to avoid me. Now you've gone and wasted my time."

Whatever. All I wanted to do was help.

As I struggled to come up with a response, Shuu swooped in to my rescue.

"There's a saying that goes, 'The elderly should be guided by their children,' right?"

"What is it with you, too...oh, my."

As the old lady turned to face Shuu, her tone changed.

"You're a handsome one, aren't you. You look just like my husband before he died. Oh, you kids. I'll forgive you, since you're handsome."

The old lady, with her bent back and fast pace, traversed the crosswalk with the green light blinking on the other side.

Shuu sighed, and said,

"She praised me...why's that?"

"Hell if I know. But we saved her."

I returned to the planter, put the magazine that I'd left there into my bag, and walked off.

Shuu called out to me with a serious look on his face.

"Hey, Yuuto. There's something that's been bothering me about what happened earlier."

"What?"

"Why are you so perfect?"

"Wh-what are you saying? How am I perfect...I already told you, I want to be perfect, but that's it."

"Well, from what I can see, you're perfect. When we played softball in gym class, your pitches were all perfect. You could even be scouted for the baseball team."

"I've built that up from throwing things in the trash..."

"And that thing that just happened. How did you know that she was in danger?"

"How did I know...well, that kind of thing is always dangerous no matter how you look at it, you know?"

"You wedged yourself between her and the road just before the bike showed up. But the fence on the street caused a blind spot, so you couldn't possibly have seen the bike coming. And you couldn't hear it either."

Shuu gave me the question straight. After all, what just happened seemed pretty unnatural.

I was torn. I thought, maybe it would be best to tell him the truth.

I'll see what happens.

"Shuu, if you had the opportunity to reset your life, would you?"

"Reset as in, start from the beginning?"

"No, you can start from whenever you like."

"That's impressive..."

Shuu seemed to be mulling over many, many things in his mind.

"The truth is...I can. I have a button that lets me reset to whatever time I want to."

"Huh? That's ridiculous."

I couldn't prove to him directly that what I was saying was true, but I explained all of the things that had happened so far. My theories and my plans were probably somewhat out of his realm of understanding, but he seemed to get the gist of what I was trying to tell him.

“...That’s a valuable ability.”

“Yeah, I agree.”

He said no more, so I couldn’t tell exactly what he really thought of it.

I couldn’t stomach my dinner.

Neither did I feel like taking a bath.

My parents chattered on and on about various things, but I ignored them and holed myself up in my room. I curled up on my bed, covered in a futon.

—I had failed.

Failure. Failure.

Still wrapped up in the futon, I pulled at my hair and curled up even further.

I’d said the one thing that never should have been said. I wasn’t supposed to have told anyone about the reset button. Obviously.

Maki-chan! Maki-chan, do you see me right now? Couldn’t you have warned me?

Now I was probably going to suffer a sudden and unpleasant divine punishment.

Even without divine punishment, I was done for. Shuu probably thought of me with disdain. He totally would.

Once, when I used a cheat code to clear a game, he scolded me harshly, saying, “That’s not how a man plays.”

That’s the kind of guy he was.

A man among men.

Compared to him, what was I? A pathetic excuse of a man.

I clawed at my sheets, messing them up, then fell facedown on my pillow, and bit it.

I’d rather he had cursed at me. I’d rather he had been envious.

How was I perfect, indeed. Shuu was much more perfect than I was. He always

kept his cool, without losing his temper, like a man should.

I wasn't any sort of man.

What should I do. I'd leaked my greatest secret and now faced divine retribution, and what's more, faced the end of my friendship with Shuu.

This was the worst, the absolute worst.

Terrible, this life is just terrible.

I was a terrible guy, and I was going to be seen as terrible, which made it even more terrible.

I shook the futon off of myself and bolted from bed. Reaching into the bag that had been thrown onto the floor, I took out the button.

The red button, embedded in the four-cornered box. My worn-out face was reflected in the surface of the box.

—Reset.

“Shuu, if you had the opportunity to reset your life, would you?”

“Reset as in, start from the beginning?”

“No, you can start from whenever you like.”

“That’s impressive...”

Shuu seemed to be mulling over many, many things in his mind.

I spoke, cutting off his train of thought.

“It’d give you unlimited insight into the future. Clairvoyance. If you could do that, it’d be like a dream come true, right?”

“Well, first of all, it’s impossible.”

“Yeah, it is. Anyway, the thing with the old lady was something a little bird told me. By which I mean, intuition.”

“Well, if that’s true, that’s pretty impressive in and of itself.”

“But would you call that clairvoyance, too? I was thinking, I might be blessed with superpowers.”

“Even if that were true, that’s cheating.”

We returned home, laughing and joking.

—Huh?

I had regretted revealing the truth about the reset button to Shuu so much, yet I had also felt kind of relieved. There was a kind of innocent joy in confiding secrets in a friend.

At the same time, I also felt fear.

For example, what if Shuu also received a reset button from Maki-chan, and became able to reset? In that case, then if our reset timings were out of alignment, what would happen? Our destinations would be different, and we may never meet again as long as we lived.

I recalled that phrase, parallel worlds, from the scientific magazine.

Maybe I was to live a life of extraordinary solitude.

But even if I were troubled by it, I would probably continue resetting.



Unlike everyone else, after school I was free to do whatever I liked.

Natsuki and Shuu were putting forth their best effort in club, so I walked home by myself. I don't know if being in the Going-Home Club made going home right after school mandatory, but I wasn't all that invested in strictly abiding by the Going-Home Club's rules, so instead of going straight home I sometimes wandered aimlessly around the city.

The main stops on my route were the bookstore and the secondhand game store. I stayed far away from places like the game center. That's because if I were to go there, it'd be full of kids getting in-game giveaways and doing wireless battles. Why did people want to fight so much, even in computers? If they wanted to battle each other so badly, may as well play shogi.** Of course, all this negatively was definitely not because of that time I was annihilated in a wireless battle and the glasses-wearing kid on the other side of the counter sneered at me as he stood up and left as I felt anger boiling inside me. I'm not that petty of a person.

As per my usual route, I entered the family restaurant. The fast food places were full of middle schoolers, and I felt like it would be awkward to go to a cafe.

Besides, since it was late afternoon, the family restaurant wasn't very crowded, and it had an unlimited drink bar.

Most of all, I was glad of the fact that it wouldn't be at all embarrassing to order sweet drinks rather than coffee.

However, when I entered the restaurant, the atmosphere was different than usual. As I walked through the door and said, "non-smoking area, please," I noticed how lively the place was, and immediately understood why.

"Hey, it's Yuuto!"

It was the first-year student Risa, the one who'd talked to me on that day when we'd received acceptance announcements. Her hair was now blonde. There are limits to how carefree you can spend your school years, I thought to myself.

"Y-yo."

"What's up? Haha, you're in Going-Home Club, huh."

"Don't get hooked on that as a topic. Besides, I'm not participating in Going-Home Club activities today."

"You're not going home yet? You're an interesting one."

That was my line. It was weird how, with Risa, comebacks came to me just like that.

"So what are you up to?"

"Club. We're having a meeting here in the family restaurant. Oh, and after this we're having a party at a senpai's house, wanna come?"

It might've been because it was Risa who asked me, that I let myself be dragged along against my better judgment, and it might've been because Natsuki and Shuu's preoccupation with their club activities had made me feel left out.

"Sure, I guess."

"Okay, come on. It'll be fun."

I waited for the club members in the restaurant to settle their bill, then followed them outside. As we walked, Risa somewhat stiffly moved to hold hands with me, but I shook my hand free.

The group finally arrived at a tall apartment building that was near the station. At the 18th floor, we weren't even at the top of the building; the whole thing gave the impression that only the rich lived here.

The apartment was spacious and luxurious. Seeing as it had a kitchen, dining room, living room, and 4 bedrooms, it would have been spacious even for an entire family. However, it was so messy that it was impossible to imagine a family living here.

"Senpai's parents are overseas right now. Isn't that great? The club comes here to hang out sometimes."

"Shouldn't you guys try to clean it up a little?"

"Guess so. When there's too much trash, we pay someone to come clean it up."

"Eehh."

This was a totally different world from what I was used to. Wasn't it expensive to do that kind of thing?

It was certainly starting to look more and more like a party. A whole lot of drinks from the fridge and a bunch of snacks. In spite of the host's wealth, they were all cheap snacks, piled up way too high.

Crap, I thought, now they're bringing out the alcohol.

A bottle of what appeared to be sake was being passed around, with no one giving it a second thought. For whatever reason, everyone drank the sake mixed with juice.

Risa was drinking sake, too. Just as I wondered how well she could hold her alcohol, she wobbled around near the group of male senpai, her face flushed red.

Damn, this is getting dangerous.

Why was I even here? This would be a mark of imperfection upon my perfect life.

"Yuuto, why don't you drink some too?"

I ignored the flashy-looking senpai with brown hair and piercings who approached me. Who cared if she was a senpai.

Risa was kissing one of the hot senpai, none too subtly.

I was so shocked, I had to look twice.

Sure enough, she was making out with the hot senpai.

Risa was drunk out of her mind, and the way that she and the senpai were snogging had gone way past the borders of charming, and was flat-out gross and lewd.

What the hell, why'd it turn out like this?

There was a sharp ringing in my ears. I was struck by intense vertigo. My chest felt like my heart was being jerked up into my throat. My breaths were ragged, arrhythmic.

Did I...really...deserve this?

Risa made her way towards me, nearly falling over.

"Hey, Yuutooo. Let's kiss."

"No, stop."

Stop it! stop it!

Disgusting! Disgusting!

You, stay over there with the others!

Coming to a place like this would only stain me. I wanted to be perfect and tidy.

I reached into my bag and felt around inside. My hand touched down on the button.

—Reset.

I made it so the events after school on that day never happened.

After that, I never spoke with Risa again.

—

Notes:

**Shogi is basically Japanese chess.

[Next chapter →](#)

Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 4: Last Stop of the 5 AM Train - Pt. 1

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“Yuuto, are you going anywhere today?”

“Sorry, I was thinking about going to the hospital later.”

“What’s wrong, Yuuto, you pregnant?”

“Idiot—”

—

Chapter 4: Last Stop of the 5 AM Train

Part 1

The first midterms of my high school life were coming up.

“Let’s study together again.”

It was Natsuki’s suggestion, to which Shuu immediately agreed.

We studied at the public library near my school. It was a big building in the park, right next to the museum that bore the same name.

Every day during the halt on club activities (where even the elite sports teams got to take a break), the minute school let out for the day, the three of us would dash to the library and get the key to one of the private study rooms. There were a limited amount of private rooms, and they were on a first-come-first serve basis, so getting the key was the responsibility of those involved in sports clubs—namely, Natsuki and Shuu.

And that’s how we ended up acquiring a private room with a four-person table. Standing from the doorway, you’d see me and Shuu on the right, with Natsuki on the left. We just kind of naturally settled into that arrangement.

As for the studying itself, it went well enough, I suppose. Now that I think about it, we had, also at Natsuki's suggestion, studied together for high school entrance exams, so it was perfectly natural to assume that we would continue to study together in high school.

The halt on club activities lasted a week, and during that week, we studied at the library together every day—except for the one day where Natsuki left early. It was to go to the hospital or something, apparently.

"Now that's a bolt out of the blue. You're in top shape, after all."

"Girls have certain problems, you know."

"Are you pregnant, or what?"

"Yuuto, are you saying you did something?"

"Of course not! I'm talking about Shuu."

"He would never!"

"Yeah, I know. Well, what if some other guy..."

I shut my mouth right there. It wasn't impossible. This was a co-ed school; there were a lot of guys besides Shuu and me. Seeing as there was a girls' volleyball team, there was bound to be a boys' volleyball team as well, and she likely had some sort of connections with the upperclassmen there. You know what they say, a woman's heart is fickle.

Shuu must've been thinking the same thing as the three of us sat in silence.

".....I'd be kinda pissed."

"Yeah."

I broke the silence with a sigh, and Shuu murmured his agreement.

To be honest, if Natsuki were to date someone other than Shuu or me, we'd feel betrayed. I knew it was a selfish thing to say. It was only a dumb statement of self-derision.

My mind wandered for a moment, causing the mechanical pencil that I'd been twirling between my fingers to fall to the floor. I'd been dropping things a lot lately, and there was still that constant ringing in my ears.

In the end, I put no effort in studying that day.

It was after midterms, and we were fooling around on the way home, which we hadn't done in a while.

"Yuuto, are you free today?"

"Sorry, I was thinking about going to the hospital later."

"What's wrong, Yuuto, you pregnant?"

"Idiot—"

Natsuki didn't know a single word of the conversations Shuu and I had had in her absence. How much did she know about how Shuu and I felt about her, I wondered.

The two of us parted on our respective paths, and I headed towards the ENT clinic, insurance card in my pocket.

"When did your tinnitus begin?"

"From when I started high school, I think."

"You're a first-year, right?"

"Yes."

"That makes it around March. You've had it for a long time, then. Have your ears been ringing constantly?"

"Yes. Sometimes, I'm acutely aware of the ringing, but at those times, I feel like it's just always been there, maybe."

"Hmm..."

The ENT doctor thought for a bit, then slowly opened his mouth to speak.

"There are many possible causes for your tinnitus. For example, it may stem from stiff shoulders, or may be a symptom of onset of mental illness. If you really want to know, you should get a more in-depth examination from the university hospital."

A week later, I skipped morning classes and went to the hospital. My parents were really worried to learn that I was getting a scan done at the university hospital, but I told them, "I'm fine, so don't worry," and left the house alone. I mean, technically speaking, I was healthy.

I went up to the receptionist and filled out my forms, and was then directed to the radiology department.

In the examination room, I lay on a bed that was little more than a paper sheet draped over a metal slab. A tunnel-like object descended towards me from above my head and made a tremendously loud clanging sound. This was the device that they would use to get an image of the cross-section of my brain, huh.

My brother had often listened to this kind of music. Aphex, if I'm not mistaken...

"Don't move."

At the sound of the voice coming from the speaker, I shifted my gaze upwards.

After about 20 minutes, the noise stopped.

Afterwards, as I made my way towards the stairs that led to the examination room, I thought I saw someone that I recognized.

I only saw her from behind, but... that was definitely Natsuki, wasn't it? Why was she at the university hospital?

Was it for the maternity ward, as Shuu and I had joked? My flippant mood soon changed to suspicion. I turned to look at the building diagram on the wall. Medicinal Health, Pediatrics, Obstetrics, Gynecology. The medicinal department was where one would go for a cold or something. She wouldn't come all the way here just for a cold. So then what...?

I might be overthinking it. No, but this was Natsuki we're talking about. How should I approach her?

When I opened the door to the examination room, the world faded to monochrome.

I'm in this world again.

There was a female doctor in a white coat sitting inside.

"Ehehe, how's it look? Does it suit me? I'm Dr. Maki-chan now, okay?"
"No no no no, it looks weird. It's too weird for Maki-chan to be a doctor."
"It's not like I wore a white coat here for cosplay. I'm like your own personal doctor, Yuuto. I'm here to help you."
"Even so, why bother dressing the part? There's no real need to wear a lab coat, and what's with those glasses you have on?"

Maki-chan looked at me with contempt as she pushed her glasses up by the bridge.

“You’ve got to do things by the books. We’re in the examination room, so might as well, you know? Alright, sit down, sit down. I’ll be explaining your examination results now—”

In an attempt to become even more in character, she changed her way of speaking a little.

“There’s just no pleasing you, is there...”

I reluctantly did as I was told, and sat on the small round stool in front of Maki-chan.

She was at the computer, pulling up brain scan images. I could see my name, “Hashidate Yuuto”, above them. MRI images were always monochrome in the first place, so they didn’t look weird in the monochrome world.

“In principle, the human brain never forgets anything. You might think you’ve forgotten something, but that is just a case of being unable to locate existing memories. It follows, then, that the human capacity to form memories is limited. However, over the course of your many resets, you’ve lived much longer than those around you, and so have picked up that many more memories. As a result of this rapid overload of your memory, even if you filter out the unneeded memories, there is still not enough space, here—”

Maki-chan made a circling motion over the center of my brain displayed on the screen. Somehow, I felt a faint buzzing sensation from the back of my neck, as if someone were actually poking around inside my brain.

“This section, your hippocampus, is beginning to atrophy.”

“Atrophy? You mean it’s withering away?”

“Correct. The hippocampus governs memory, so its atrophication is a sign that your memory capacity is also degrading. You forget not only bits of your past, but also parts of your most recent resets. Am I correct?”

“I feel like I’ve forgotten them, but at the same time, those memories seem almost within reach.”

“I see...”

Maki-chan propped her chin up onto her hand. It looked like she was thinking very hard about it, but I couldn't really tell whether she was actually thinking, or just playing the part as a doctor.

Dr. Maki-chan finally spoke.

"It might not be a good idea to use the button from now on, then."

"...You mean, I can't use it any more?"

That would be a problem for me. After all, the button was an indispensable part of my plan to lead a perfect and tidy life.

"It's not that you can't use it anymore, per se..."

"It'll be a problem, a real problem! This is terrible! If I can't use the button..."

"But the more you use it, the more your hippocampus will wither away. Do you want to keep resetting despite the risks? You want to keep resetting that badly?"

If I were to keep resetting, my brain would slowly wither away.

What would happen after it decayed completely?

I'd die, probably.

As I imagined the consequences, my mind was engulfed in a wave of fear.

The gradual decay of my brain, and my subsequent death, was a harsh consequence to face. However, it might be worth the ability to reset. After all, that button was already such an integral component of my life strategy.

If I told Maki-chan now that I would stop using it, everything that had happened would be for naught.

If that happened, I would be dragged back to that classroom, reeking of feces. I would be forced to live my old life again, with perfection forever out of reach.

No way could I let that happen.

"A strong wish."

When I raised my head at the sound of Maki-chan's voice, the world was once more flooded with color. Before me was a male doctor, sitting at the desk.

He studied my face, and spoke.

"Take a look at the monitor, and I'll explain for you."

“Eh?Uh, okay.”

There were MRI scans once again displayed on the monitor, but they were different from the ones Maki-chan had showed me.

“This is your cerebrum, and this is your cerebellum. Here’s the brain stem, and inside of it is something called the hippocampus. Suppose a blood vessel here were to be cut. You’d have a hemorrhage, and this part here would be all dark. But that’s not what we have here. Yours is very healthy.”

“Uhm...so my hippocampus isn’t decaying...?”

“Your hippocampus? What you’re talking about is Parkinson’s Disease. It doesn’t look like that’s the case, but...do you suspect something? Do you get hand tremors, or anything like that?”

“No, I...ah.”

I recalled how I’d tried to twirl my pencil but dropped it. I wonder if that was because of tremors.

“What is it?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

I’ll just assume that it was all my imagination.

After all, there was nothing I could do about not being able to reset anymore.



The end-of-term exams came and went without a hitch, and summer vacation arrived.

The ringing in my ears showed no sign of stopping. I still couldn’t tell if Maki-chan’s prediction of the atrophication of my hippocampus was coming true or not.

But there was no denying it. My ears kept ringing. It might have been my imagination, but I felt that I was also experiencing more bouts of shaking in my hands.

As soon as summer vacation started, I visited the hospital a second time.

“You still have the ringing in your ears? But your scans showed no anomalies in your brain... It may be a psychogenic reaction, so let me direct you to the

psychosomatics department.”

“Psychosomatics?”

“Sometimes, physical symptoms will arise from psychological problems. In those cases, we usually refer them at first to the medicinal department. We don’t have any specialists in psychosomatics here, but there’s a doctor in the medicinal department who also happens to be familiar with psychosomatics.”

“So if I go there, the ringing in my ears will be cured?”

“It wouldn’t be wise to go in there with too many expectations. There are plenty of patients there with unexplained symptoms.”

He made a call to the medicinal department, and secured an appointment for me. It seemed that I would be able to have an examination immediately.

I cheerfully started off in the direction of the medicinal department.

“Hashidate-kun. Room 5, please.”

As I stood up to enter, I locked eyes with the person who was exiting Room 5.

“...Natsuki?”

“Y-Yuuto?”

Natsuki turned around, fleeing back into the room she’d come from. I chased after her. It was my examination room, after all, and I still remembered the time when I thought I had seen her figure in the hallway of the hospital that day.

Once she stepped into the examination room, Natsuki made a beeline for the elderly doctor inside, hoping to hide behind him. As I reached out my hand towards Natsuki, the doctor interrupted me.

“Calm down. What’s the fuss? Sugita-san, who is this?”

“...My friend.”

“Sugita-san’s friend, why are you here?”

“I’m Hashidate Yuuto...my name was called.”

“Hm? ...Ah, yes, you are the next patient.”

He glanced over my medical charts and gave a look of understanding. I pressed the question immediately,

“Doctor, is Natsuki ill?”

“Since she’s at a hospital, she must be experiencing some kind of symptoms, no?”

But this is a matter of patient privacy, so I'm afraid I can't tell you the specifics."

"Doctor, it's fine. He's my...friend, you see."

Once he heard her words, his face took on a troubled look.

"Is something wrong?"

The curtains at the back of the examination room were pushed aside, and a man wearing a lab coat entered the room. He was a doctor too, probably.

"Ah, Dr. Kakitagawa. This one here is the patient's friend, it seems."

The doctor, who was apparently named Kakitagawa, looked to be about 30 years old. He had a fearless expression on his face, and really looked like the cool, sporty type.

"A friend? You mean this one?"

"Wait, you've got it wrong. I'm the next patient."

"Um...Doctor? Could you tell Yuuto about it?"

The doctors' eyes met. The older one nodded, and stood from his seat.

"Dr. Kakitagawa, please give the explanation. It falls under your department, after all."

Now it was Dr. Kakitagawa's turn to sit in the chair.

"Understood. Sugita-san, and um...Hashidate-kun. First of all, please sit. Hm? ...Hashidate....Yuuto-kun?"

"Yes?"

"Do you by any chance have an older brother?"

"I do. He's in college."

"Kouga University?"

"Yes. He started a year ago."

"I see. I'm an associate professor at Kouga University. My name's Kakitagawa Yuzuru. So...would your older brother be, by any chance, Hashidate Taishi?"

"You know my brother?"

"I know him quite well."

A professor who knew of my tidy and perfect brother!

I stood a little straighter. My brother, who had just started university, had

made an impression on an associate professor! That was nothing to sneeze at. Just as expected of my brother.

“Anyway, we can save the conversation about your brother for some other time. So, Yuuto-kun, you want to know about Sugita-san’s illness, am I correct?”

I nodded.

“How about you, Sugita-san? Are you really okay with me telling him?”

Natsuki, too, nodded.

Dr. Kakitagawa let out a sigh of resignation, and spoke to us as respectfully as he could.

“Sugita-san is also aware of her own situation, so I don’t see a point in hiding it from you, but I’m not altogether pleased to be doing this, either. She has a small tumor that may affect her respiratory and digestive systems.”

“Eh!?”

My mind went blank.

“We cannot perform a full biopsy at this time, so it’s unclear whether it’s a malignant tumor or not—that is, whether it will turn into cancer or not. From what the endoscopy showed, it appears not to be of the cancerous type. However, it is also different from any other case we’ve seen.”

“...What do you mean?”

“It’s possible that this is a new illness, one that we cannot diagnose at this time.”

What the hell is that?

Unknown? A new illness? Unable to diagnose?

They had no idea how to cure it? That’s what he was trying to say, wasn’t it.

The more I tried to desperately comprehend what the doctor had just said, the less sense it made to me.

“Doctor, Natsuki is...”

“If you’re asking about what conclusions we drew...”

He stopped his words short.

Natsuki nodded again. The doctor opened his mouth to speak.

“We have concluded that by our best estimates, she has about three months left to live.”

Huh...?

Natsuki was going to die?

Did he really just say that?

“But...Natsuki’s perfectly healthy right now, isn’t she?!”

The doctor explained.

“When we ran blood tests on her, there was no abnormal increase in white blood cells like what we would normally see with a tumor. From a biological standpoint, she seems perfectly healthy. However, from what we can tell from our observations of the disease’s progression over the past three months, we can only predict that in three months’ time, her respiratory and digestive organs will cease to function.”

“B-but Doctor, you might find a cure before then, right?”

“That’s precisely why I was summoned from Kouga University. I will do everything I can to find out about her disease, do further research on it, and find a cure.”

What was all this.

Natsuki had only three months left to live...

But this doctor was going to cure her illness. Could I believe in the words of this doctor, who knew my brother? I had no choice but to believe in him.

Did Natsuki really only have three months left to live? Three months amounted to only half of the second semester, and would end right about halfway through the school year. Not even able to finish her first year in high school...

“Hey, Yuuto.”

Natsuki’s voice pulled me out of my daze.

“I know that I let you know about it, but please don’t tell anyone else about my illness.”

By “anyone else,” she meant Shuu, didn’t she.

She had an incurable illness. There was no way that I could deny her request.

Natsuki and I exited the hospital in silence. We walked together in silence, and eventually parted in silence as we headed towards our respective homes. I waved at her, and Natsuki waved back at me; that, at least, we still had between us.

Huh? What had happened to my appointment?



I decided to become a doctor.

I decided that I should become a doctor and cure Natsuki's illness.

To get my feet wet, I bought some home-use medical texts and read them. I understood at once that this was far too much content for me to remember immediately.

If I spread myself too thin, I wouldn't get anywhere. The doctor had said that it would affect Natsuki's respiratory and digestive systems, so I should concentrate on those. By digestive systems, he must have meant the stomach and intestines, and by the respiratory system, the trachea and the lungs.

I headed to the university hospital bookstore.

From the shelves that were separated by topic, I picked out books that seemed from just the title like they were about the respiratory and digestive systems, and bought them. They were expensive. Thinking about what little allowance money I had leftover was painful.

I did my best to read them.

I came to the conclusion that...I could not understand them at all.

Did one really have to understand all of this to become a doctor?

What could I do to help Natsuki, then?



I managed to change my own hospital appointment to a different day. They gave me medicine to help alleviate the ringing in my ears, and told me to come back to the hospital every other week.

The elderly doctor from earlier, who was in charge of my treatment, wasn't too involved in Natsuki's case, and it didn't seem to me like the right time or place to ask about it. I could only go on believing that Dr. Kakitagawa was researching her illness.

After my appointment, I sat on a bench in the hospital next to the stairs to rest for a bit, and happened to see Dr. Kakitagawa coming down the stairs.

"Are you here as an outpatient?"

"Yeah. Um...How should I say this...Natsuki..."

"Are you asking about her status? Very well, come with me."

I climbed up the stairs behind him. I thought for sure that we were going to one of the examination rooms, but instead, he went right past the top floor and headed for the roof.

When he opened the door to the roof, the hot summer air slammed into me like a wall. I pushed my way through the heat and stepped foot onto the roof, where I felt a breeze caressing my cheek. Though the weather wasn't exactly what I'd call nice, it felt good to simply be swallowed up by uninterrupted skies overhead.

"Is it okay if I smoke?"

"Yeah."

A doctor who smoked, huh. Well, I guess even doctors and associate professors couldn't be perfect, I thought to myself.

"You hate smokers?"

"No, not particularly."

"Your expression says otherwise. You're just like Hashidate-kun in that way. Your words and your face tell very different stories."

As he spoke, he tilted his head towards the sky and blew out a stream of smoke.

"What do you think of my brother?"

"You curious?"

"He never comes home."

The doctor, once again, exhaled a trail of smoke.

"He's got high specs. His grades are good, and he's sharp... Hearing me praise your brother makes you happy, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, I guess..."

My reply had been fairly nonchalant, but of course I was happy. Yet I had answered with a bit of sarcasm.

"To tell the truth, I'm afraid of him."

"Why's that, Doctor? Do you...hate my brother?"

"I don't hate him at all. I'm simply afraid. Those who are incredibly sharp will sometimes find themselves pushed over the edge and lose control..."

"My brother isn't the type to lose control."

The doctor inhaled slowly, and exhaled at the same relaxed pace.

"Are you any different?"

"I don't think I'll lose control, either."

He exhaled with a quick puff.

"I wonder about that..."

I didn't quite understand what he was getting at. It occurred to me that something must have happened between my brother and Dr. Kakitagawa, and that was where the doctor had formed his conclusions. I figured that it would be best not to touch upon this subject any further, and looked to switch to a different topic.

"Is Natsuki doing okay?"

"To tell the truth, it's hard to tell. We're having a hard time just holding the disease in check..."

"But you said you'd cure her!"

"Yes, I will. I can't allow myself not to cure her. Besides, there are other patients in the same boat."

Having said that, the doctor looked at me, as if waiting to read my reaction.

"There are other patients, meaning that Natsuki isn't the only one with it, right? Then it should be all the easier to find a cure!"

"We actually haven't even figured out the cause."

"Eh? Wait, so, but then, a cure—"

"That's what I'm researching right now. We never imagined that it would be this difficult to figure out."

He roughly extinguished his cigarette in a portable ashtray, and walked towards the door. I followed a few steps behind.



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Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 4: Last Stop of the 5 AM Train - Pt. 2

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Warnings: suicide

"It feels like I'm just running around in circles, always in the same place, like I'll never be able to stop the pain. When I think about how this might go on forever, it makes me want to die then and there. Ridiculous, isn't it? Have I finally gone off the deep end?"

She stared right into my eyes, anguish written plainly across her face, as if she were trying to express to me directly just how much she was hurting. As if she were accusing me, "It's all your fault."

—

Chapter 4: Last Stop of the 5 AM Train

Part 2

In August, Natsuki, Shuu, and I started hanging out a lot.

It was Natsuki who'd suggested it.

Seeing as it was the weekend, there was no practice for the sports clubs. It was summer vacation, Natsuki argued, so everyone should take this chance to enjoy ourselves outside of home.

We were to meet at Hachiougi Station, just past noon.

"Where to?"

I wasn't listening, and Shuu looked like he was waiting for Natsuki to say something.

"Just follow my lead today, okay?"

She dragged us to the ticket gates.

"Keeping it a secret, huh. Well, how about it? Yuuto?"

"I'll go along with you."

"Okay...if that's the case, I'll just use my card. I have no idea where we're going, after all."

Shuu rummaged around in his pocket and pulled out his IC card to swipe us through.

"...How's your health?"

I asked Natsuki as I walked beside her, while keeping my eye on Shuu, who was in front of us.

"I'm fine. There's nothing that's really gotten anyone worried. The doctor said that I should just go on with life as usual. It is summer vacation, after all. You and Shuu both have had summer vacations full of nothing but test prep for the past two years, so this time we should all make unforgettable memories, just the three of us."

Natsuki, too, had her gaze on Shuu. He was standing in front of the ticket machine, trying to get the machine to deposit the correct number of tickets. That cautious reliability was just so Shuu-like. My eyes met with Natsuki's, and we burst into giggles.

I had always thought that we would be able to spend our three years in high school just like this. Right now, Natsuki may be standing beside me with a smile on her face, but come summer next year, she...

"We still don't know."

"Eh?"

Natsuki tilted her head up to look directly at me.

"Next year, the three of us might come together again and hang out all through summer vacation without having to worry about test prep or anything. We still don't know what the future has in store."

"Yeah...you're right."

Shuu ambled his way back to us from the ticket machine, and the three of us got on the train that was headed downtown.

My anxiety over Natsuki's health was showing on my face, catching Shuu's attention.

"C'mon Yuuto, what's up with you, getting all worried over Natsuki like that?"

Not knowing the seriousness of her situation, he minced no words in asking me the question.

"You think it's weird? But hey, I don't think it's just today. He's always this nice," Natsuki said to both of us. "Of course, so are you, Shuu."

And Natsuki was Natsuki, no matter what.

Our destination was the city baseball stadium...or rather, the hero show next to it.

"Natsuki, this is...?"

I blurted it out, without thinking. I mean, wasn't her love of hero shows supposed to be a secret from Shuu?

"It's fine! I've been thinking, it's something I really like, so why hide it, you know?"

She sure was putting on a gallant act, but her face was beet red. She kept glancing at Shuu out of the corner of her eye, as if waiting to see how he would react.

"Man, I haven't been to a hero show in forever!"

At Shuu's words, Natsuki, who'd been trembling like a rabbit in the brush, brightened up a little.

"Shuu, you like these kind of things?"

"Yeah, I do. When I was little, I bugged my parents to bring me to these shows all the time."

For Shuu, since his parents no longer got along, each little memory that he had with his parents was precious to him. Today's events would likewise become precious new memories for him and Natsuki, then.

Sure, I felt kind of lonely, now that the secret between me and Natsuki was no longer a secret, but since Natsuki liked Shuu, I felt like it was something he ought to know. Still, it left a bad taste in my mouth.

We all sat down, with Natsuki sandwiched between me and Shuu.

"I don't think I've ever been to a hero show."

I looked around the unfamiliar stage in fascination.

"Well, I haven't been to one in forever," remarked Shuu.

"Fufufu, I'm warning you now, the hero shows here have really stepped up their game lately..."

Natsuki was right.

Smoke billowed out from behind the curtains, filling the stage, and as the heroes leapt out from the smoke, the arena was filled with cheers.

The performance was overwhelming from beginning to end. They dashed so quickly, it seemed to me as if I were watching a sped-up video. They flew from one end of the stage to another on wires, beating up enemies, the final blows accompanied by huge explosions.

As I watched the story unfold on stage, I recalled an event from my childhood.

There was a hero charm strap that Natsuki wanted more than anything, so the two of us had gone to the toy store to look for it, but since it was a toy that had come out quite a while ago, it was sold out at the time. The displays were full of all the new hero toys, and once a show finished airing, they would clear out all the merchandise from the shelves to make room for new ones.

I wanted to find one for her so badly that the next weekend, I went around on my bike, visiting every single toy shop I knew of. I even went to places that I doubted would have it in stock, like the toy booth at the shopping mall and the radio-controlled car store. The next week, I visited all those stores again, and finally found it in an ancient little store that looked about ready to collapse. That Monday, I was in high spirits, all ready to present it to Natsuki, when I saw that she already had one attached to her backpack. Turned out that her dad had

bought it somewhere online. I didn't say a word to her, just ended up keeping the strap and taking it home. It might still be buried in my room somewhere.

Once the show ended, they let people get onto the stage to take photographs with the actors.

With a cheerful "C'mon, let's go take pictures with them!" I pushed Natsuki towards the stage.

"N-No, I'm good..."

Natsuki shyed away, embarrassed to be seen doing the same thing as all these little kids.

"Aww, come on, let's do it, for memories' sake."

Flanked by Shuu and me, Natsuki had no choice but to be dragged along. She made a cute face like she was being forced to do it, but she was all smiles as the three of us walked to the stage. When we got to the front of the line, Natsuki said, "Let's take it together!" and it was her turn this time to drag us up.

We posed in front of the heroes, with Natsuki in the middle, and had them take the picture. It felt just like the day we graduated middle school and took that picture.

After it was developed, the photograph was framed and given to us. Our smiles looked so genuinely happy. Behind us were the heroes, standing like they were protecting us.

"Thank you so much! I'll treasure it forever!"

Natsuki held the picture tightly to her chest the whole way home.

"There was a hero show at Hachiougi station earlier, too! I wish we could've gone!!" The entire time we were on the train, Natsuki couldn't contain her smile.

We were sitting in a row on the train, with me on Natsuki's left, and Shuu on her right. Whenever we were all in a row, it was in this order.

The train continued on towards the setting sun. We had fallen into a comfortable silence, gazing at the city landscape outside the window, now dyed in the orange of the sunset.

"I wish summer would never end..." murmured Natsuki.

Shuu laughed. "Natsuki, don't say such childish things."

You don't know the half of it, Shuu. Natsuki doesn't have much time left. Who knows just how many more sunsets she'll be able to enjoy like this?

"Let's hang out again next weekend," I suggested to both of them. "You're down, right, Shuu?"

"Yeah, sure thing, but..."

Natsuki's eyes met with mine. She gave me the faintest of smiles, and nodded without a word.

The next week, we went to the zoo.

The week after that, we visited an aquarium.

Though I knew it was all in vain, I devoured medical texts from Monday to Friday, while Natsuki and Shuu did their club activities, and on the weekends we would all go out to play.

If only this fulfilling summer could continue on forever.

If only these times where Natsuki's health was perfect, and Shuu and I could stay by her side, could continue on forever.

If only they could continue on forever...

Here, now, in this instant, I felt that I was truly happy.

That's not to say that it was perfect. I knew that there was a complex balance to be maintained. Natsuki's illness was set to take a turn for the worse once second semester rolled around. And then autumn would come, and she might be gone by then.

There was nothing I could do to help here, was there? No matter how many medical texts I read, if I didn't understand them, then I was utterly useless.

If only second semester would never come.

Then Natsuki would be able to live.

Right, I should just let it drag out!

I should just repeat these few weeks over and over again.

I took out the reset button, and held it in both hands.

Then I recalled Maki-chan's warning about my hippocampus decaying.

But Natsuki was far more important than my health.

That's what I believed.

I closed my eyes, and let a scene from the past come to mind.

I put all my willpower behind my thumb, and

—Reset.

The first midterms of my high school life.

As always, Shuu, Natsuki and I studied together.

Summer vacation. Studying. Clubs. Hanging out.

It was a blissful few months.

Eventually, the end drew near.

I held the button tightly.

—Reset.

The first midterms of high school.

As always, the three of us competed against each other for grades. They turned out so-so.

We studied again for the finals. We got pretty high scores.

We headed into summer vacation in high spirits, and enjoyed clubs, studying, and playing around.

As September approached, I took out the button.

—Reset.

—Reset.

—Reset.

—Reset.

-----Reset.....

I reset our lives, over and over again. Our fun-filled days never changed. They didn't get stale. They didn't grow old.

I'd thought that if I kept working on attaining medical knowledge, eventually I would know as much as doctors did. But reality wasn't that kind. Sure enough, it seemed like my hippocampus was losing capacity, and I started forgetting everything I had learned. Meanwhile, I started to care less and less about my grades.

All I needed was for Natsuki to live.

All I needed was for these three months, where Natsuki could live her life, to continue forever.

That was all I needed...

The school days I repeated didn't dull, but my academics sure did. My memories became muddled, and my decision-making abilities went on the decline.

One time, I went to the summer festival with everyone, and dropped a chicken kabob.

At the poolside, I suddenly felt dizzy and fell right into the pool.

I became unable to recall my own home phone number.

With these little slip-ups, I slowly became an altogether different person. I started drifting away from perfection.

I was becoming a different person... No, actually, resetting was my sole purpose in life. I absolutely had to reset, for Natsuki's sake.

August, once again, drew to a close.

I took out the button.

—Reset.

As we exited the hospital together, Natsuki spoke.

“Hey, Yuuto, this might be a really insensitive thing to bring up right now, but will you hear me out for a bit?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“I really like Shuu.”

“...I know.”

“Oh, so you knew...sorry.”

“Don’t sweat it. Shuu’s a good guy. And the three of us can stay together this way.”

“Yeah but...I kind of feel really bitter about it.”

“Bitter?”

“I like him, but it seems like no matter how hard I try, I can’t close the distance between him and me.”

“That’s probably because you guys are friends...”

“It feels like I’ll keep falling behind, bitterly, for the next hundred years. Forever, maybe.”

“What are y-...”

“I wonder why do I feel so bitter? I mean, in a hundred years, I’m not even going to be alive anymore, so why do I hear a voice in the back of my mind telling me, that I’m probably going to go on feeling bitter until the end of time?”

“You really feel...bitter?”

“...Yeah, I do. Just living makes me feel bitter. Isn’t that weird? Despite the fact that I’m not doing anything out of the ordinary, despite the fact that I’m going to die soon.”

“You won’t die, Natsuki. You won’t die. It’ll be fine. I promise.”

“That’s not it...that’s not the point here.”

Natsuki pressed her palm to her throat, her pain evident in her expression.

“...I don’t want to feel like this anymore. I’m scared. It feels like this bitterness

will never go away. It feels like I'm just running around in circles, always in the same place, like I'll never be able to stop the pain. When I think about how this might go on forever, it makes me want to die then and there. Ridiculous, isn't it? Have I finally gone off the deep end?"

She stared right into my eyes, anguish written plainly across her face, as if she were trying to express to me directly just how much she was hurting. As if she were accusing me, "It's all your fault." Fear clutched at my heart, and I stumbled backwards, my breath caught in my throat, unable to croak out an answer.

"B-but...Natsuki, you...Natsuki..."

I see...

Every day that I repeated was, to Natsuki, another day where her attempts to get closer to Shuu would be in vain. Even when she did feel like progress had been made, all that was always wiped clean by my actions. This never-ending cycle of bitterness was no doubt more painful than any hell in all of Buddhist scripture. For the dying Natsuki, every day was more precious than the last, but each time I pressed the button, I was reducing those precious days to nothingness...

Ah!

I've been running around in circles this whole time.

I'd just assumed right off that bat that Natsuki and I had the same view on this—that she, too, wanted to stay with us forever, to keep on living.

But that wasn't what she wanted.

What have I done? Nothing. Nothing but make Natsuki feel bitter.

The ringing in my ears came through like a wrecking ball, scattering my thoughts.



This life is terrible, just terrible, sang out a voice from somewhere.

It really was.

It was terrible, through and through.

After dinner, I told my parents, “I’m gonna go buy something, be right back,” and went outside. With no destination in mind, I plodded on, my feet like deadweights, until I reached the shopping district. This was the first time I had ever been out so late. The whole area was surprisingly well-lit.

The idea of committing some sort of petty crime occurred to me, but I realized that I couldn’t think of single thing a higher schooler like me out in the shopping district in the middle of the night could reasonably do.

At some point, the ringing in my ears had changed from a high keening sound to a more rumble sort of sound. I managed to continue walking upright, but I couldn’t even tell if I was going in a straight line or not.

I continued with my ungainly walking, and pondered.

God, it was all my fault. It was all my fault that Natsuki was suffering.

I kept going forward, my feet heavy. I felt like a machine. I couldn’t stop. Neither my thoughts nor my body would stop.

This was all part of the thing Maki-chan had said about my hippocampus withering away, wasn’t it.

With each and every reset, I was gradually wearing my body down to its limits. All for Natsuki’s sake, or so I’d thought.

Natsuki and I had something special between us—or so I’d thought.

All that was just a delusion. A selfish assumption on my part.

With each reset I made, Natsuki’s suffering increased. She had simply withstood it all without even knowing where it was coming from, had felt it weigh more on her heart with each passing day. This pain in her heart was probably even worse than the pain from her illness.

I’d thought it had all been for Natsuki’s sake...

For Natsuki’s sake...

...Had it really?

...Had it really been for Natsuki’s sake?

Hadn’t I just been doing this for my own sake—my own perfection and

tidiness—all this time?

Hadn't I just been resetting for my own sake while convincing myself that it was for Natsuki?

Hadn't I just been resetting because I wanted the three of us to stay together?

Ah, exactly.

It was my fault.

This was all my fault!

I had reset the world—god knows how many times—all for the sake of my own ego, and hadn't even managed to save Natsuki, let alone anyone else. In the end, I had, in the name of perfection, done nothing but continuously cast ripples in the fabric of time. In truth, it was the world that was already perfect, and my actions were nothing but radio static, weren't they? Were my resets throwing the world off balance?

Maybe that would explain why Natsuki was going through so much.

Maybe my resets were the direct cause of her pain.

If only I hadn't reset so much.

If only I had never pressed the reset button—

But there was no going back.

There was no knowing if I might just vanish off the face of the earth if I tried to go back.

After all, I was nothing but noise, upsetting the balance of the world.

If I didn't exist, the world would be so much better.

If I didn't exist.

.....

If I vanished, the reset button would vanish along with me, and the world would surely become perfect and tidy, with not a single blemish.

It was I who was ruining the world.

.....

.....

Well, I guess there was my answer.

I've figured it all out after all.

That was all there was to it, wasn't it.

Even if I were all perfection and tidiness, there was nothing I could do.

I wobbled to my feet, dragging my feet one way, then another. I headed off in no direction in particular.

I got the impression that someone had tried to rope me in for a sales offer.

I got the impression that I had bought something at a vending machine.

I got the impression that I had eaten a beef bowl.

I got the impression that I had entered a manga cafe.

Maybe there was no such thing as reality. Only impressions.

But even so, even if that were true, I still didn't know what I was supposed to do to kill all this time.

Morning came. I was at the station. At the concourse where I had confessed to Natsuki.

I was an idiot. A huge idiot.

Maybe if someone had told me sooner, things would have turned out a little differently.

"You are different from your brother. You'll never become perfect." Ah, if only someone out there had scolded me with those words. Maybe then I wouldn't have chased after his shadow incessantly like a complete fool...

If only someone had told me that my life would never be perfect.

I tried to move into the station itself, but my steps faltered, and I bumped my way through the turnstile. Neither my hands nor my legs would move the way I wanted them to.

Figuring that I wouldn't be able to make it down the stairs without falling, I

rode the escalator down to the platform.

The first train of the day was scheduled to leave soon. There were people around, only a few, scattered here and there.

I'm sorry, everyone.

I'm so sorry, everyone.

I'm sorry for tainting this world.

For making it imperfect.

Please let Natsuki be happy, in a world without me.

I stood at the edge of the platform.

I glanced down in the direction of the reset button, nestled in my bag.

It was true that the button had been a great help to me, but that was no longer the point.

If I kept using the button, I would eventually lose all my memories, crippling my mind. If that was how things were going to end, then might as well end it all right here instead.

After all, wasn't that really what it meant to "reset one's life"?

It didn't mean to go back so I could fix my own life and everyone else's.

I wasn't one to believe in reincarnation or the circle of transmigration or any of that. That just meant that I wouldn't just disappear, I'd go to the instant right before my birth. As a human child, with any luck.

The afterlife? I didn't think there was such a thing, either. The world, as it was, after my life was over, and the world that had existed before I had entered it—both were worlds that didn't hold a trace of my own existence. They were the same, in that respect.

Five AM. The first train was coming.

The sound of a horn, blaring.

As the train rushed in, I calmly tipped my body forward, letting myself fall right onto the tracks.

I watched the platform slip by me in slow motion, and slowly closed my eyes.

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Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 5: Think Ahead and Deal With It - Pt. 1

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"The wishes of people, the strongest wishes, are what brought me into being and continue to give me the power to live."

"...So, like a god or something?"

"If that's what you think, then perhaps."

I felt conflicted. If Maki-chan really were a god, then what was the meaning behind all the head-bowing I had done at shrines, with my palms pressed together? Had I been barking up the wrong tree all this time? Were those gods that we revered all really just incomprehensible, cosplaying girls?

—

Chapter 5: Think Ahead and Deal With It

Part 1

I think, came Maki-chan's voice, you've worn yourself out.

Not true, I said. Just, a lot's happened.

This sort of life was terrible. How many thousands of years have I lived up until now?

Really, though, how many was it? How many hundred, thousands, millions of years?

How long have I been wasting all the time I had?

After all those ages and ages of meddling with time, the conclusion that I had arrived at was to destroy myself so that perfection could be attained.

Why had the life reset button come to me, of all people?

It was your strong wish, said Maki-chan. I wanted to help you grant that wish.

Also not true, I retorted. I never was able to become perfect like my brother.

I had made a wish, that much was clear, but that wish had been far out of my reach. It was a wish that I never would have been able to deal with.

Well, whatever.

I've found my answer now, at least.

Not so fast, came Maki-chan's voice, again. It's not game over yet, you know.

That new game with the bonus stage, where I was invincible?

No, that sort of life was terrible. That was the worst of the worst.

Was Maki-chan aware of that too—did she want to warn me—or was she really just that innocent and naive?

This isn't a New Game, it's a Continue, she said,

in that incredibly innocent voice.

I got the impression that someone had scolded me.

Pushing that thought aside, I tried to swat away the noise that was flitting around in front of my face. I raised my right hand to a backhand position, at about eye level, and swept it from left to right. There was an effort to put power into the motion, but I saw absolutely no evidence of my having moved. In fact, there wasn't even the slightest feeling, even, that my hand had moved.

Wait—'I raised my hand,' could I even say that I had raised my hand? Was I standing? Was I was lying down? Maybe even upside down?

Could I even feel any sensations?

".....to-kun, Yuuto-kun....."

I heard a voice. I could hear sounds. I could realise that I was perceiving sound. What I'm getting at is, because I was able to hear sounds, I realised that I was now....uh, I'm not sure what I'm trying to say.

".....Ah....this is terrible.....this life....."

Those words that I spoke were the very words that had been circling incessantly in my brain for the longest time now.

So, I could hear, and I could speak.

—Did that mean that I was alive?

“Yuuto! I’m listening! Yuuto!”

“Don’t worry, nothing’s wrong, Mrs. Hashidate. He’s just come to, and he might have some trouble sorting out his memories, but it’ll be temporary. He’ll be back to normal before you know it.”

“I can’t thank you enough, doctor! He’ll be fine, won’t he?”

“Miraculously, he didn’t suffer any major external wounds. Just some minor bruising on his arms and a slight concussion. I would suggest getting some tests done on his head, to be safe.”

Who were they talking about? The voice sounded like my mom’s, but then again, it didn’t quite sound like her, as far as I could tell.

When that guy said “nothing’s wrong,” was he referring to me? I could hear, and speak, too, and this guy who was apparently a doctor had said “nothing’s wrong,” and, uhh, and then. But anyway, I couldn’t figure out why I couldn’t move my arms.

Eventually, I came to the hazy realization that I was lying on my back, but I was aware of the fact that my brain couldn’t handle any exertion past that.

Here I was, alive.

As soon as the thought crossed my mind, it was as if the noose of anxiety had been cut loose, and I fell again into a deep sleep.

When my eyes fluttered open, I found myself assaulted on all sides by morning. I swiveled my head to take a good look at my surroundings. It appeared that I was in a hospital room, the small space lit up by the morning sun filtering through the curtains.

I heard a knock at the door. Whoever it was, they opened the door without waiting for my answer, and all color immediately fled from the world. The person standing in the doorway was a girl, wearing a white lab coat.

"Dr. Maki-chan's here!""I figured at much...""Not feeling too well, are you. Shall I give you an injection to make you feel better?""My instincts are telling me to save myself, so no thanks, I'll pass."

Maki-chan stood by the bed, looking down at me.

"You did something stupid, yeah?"

She said it like an accusation.

"Did you save me?""Of course not," she cooed. "Why would I ever do something like that?"

Now she was wearing a bright smile.

"Yuuto, you fell right smack in the middle of the train tracks~ You lay yourself down so fast it gave me the shock of a lifetime, and the train zoomed right over your body~ But you're fine. The only injuries that you've sustained are on your arms and head from actually falling onto the tracks. Since you hit your head, they've run you through tests, but you're right as rain. Nothing wrong with you now."""Nothing wrong...""Yep. Your little leap into the abyss has no consequences now. You tried so hard, too."""What about the reset button...?""It's still here. You can still use it. Only if you want to, though."""Hey, Maki-chan, why did you decide to give me the reset button?"

I asked the same question as I'd asked in the dream from earlier—though whether that was really a dream or not, I couldn't say.

"Well, because you had a strong wish."

It was the same answer I'd gotten earlier. But unlike last time, she continued.

"My kind are able to exist because of the strong desires that humans harbor."""What do you mean by that?"'"The wishes of people, the strongest wishes, are what brought me into being and continue to give me the power to live."""...So, like a god or something?"'"If that's what you think, then perhaps."

So Maki-chan was a god...

I felt conflicted. If Maki-chan really were a god, then what was the meaning behind all the head-bowing I had done at shrines, with my palms pressed together? Had I been barking up the wrong tree all this time? Were those gods that we revered all really just incomprehensible, cosplaying girls?

"So, then...suppose I wish for everything you've done for me to be wiped away. Could you grant that wish?"'"I've already granted you a wish, haven't I?""Yeah, but..."'"It was because you had a strong wish that I granted it. Even if you wish for something else because your previous wish didn't go well, the new wish has little chance of surpassing the first one in strength."'"I get what you mean, but..."'"Your voice is listless, Yuuto. Weak as water. Your thoughts and wishes, too, are all weak. Are you even breathing?"'"Didn't you just tell me earlier that I was alive and well?""Haven't you heard of something people call 'the living dead'?"'"That sounds really cool, actually."'"It's not, though. You wouldn't know if you were dead or alive. Maybe you would call it being half-dead, half-alive?"'"What, like Schrödinger's cat?"'"More like a picture taken at the exact, decisive instant when Schrödinger swung a hammer down at the skull of his pet cat. I think he won the Pulitzer Prize later that year."'"Don't just make stuff up."'"Beings that are half-dead and half-alive are about as cool as the lie I just told."

What was Maki-chan even here for? Was she here to laugh at me for trying to die, failing, and ending up in the hospital?

I looked up at her face, which was looking down at me from my bedside, and sure enough, her mouth was curved in a smile. But it wasn't a sneer; rather, it was a calm smile. One that said "Go on, do what you want," like I was being flung out of the nest.

"Your breakfast will be here soon. I hope you'll be able to eat it."

For the first time since I'd woken up, I noticed how hungry I was.

Next thing I knew, color had returned to the world, and Maki-chan was gone.

That afternoon, Shuu and Natsuki came to visit me. Having only eaten the bland hospital breakfast earlier, I was glad to receive an assortment of cakes and snacks from them. Apparently it was Natsuki's idea.

"I was surprised at first," began Natsuki.

"We heard that you went and fell onto the train tracks."

"They said that you were mostly unhurt, so I assumed that you had managed to slip to the wall and squeeze by, but it turned out you stayed right under the train."

"I don't remember that happening at all."

"Do you have memory loss? Are you okay? I might've told you something weird earlier..."

"I think I'll be fine..."

Natsuki looked at me, worry showing clearly in her eyes. She remembered the last conversation we'd had, which meant there hadn't been a reset of the world yet.

"How long have I been here?"

"No idea, man. I didn't ask."

"I met with your mom, but she mostly just told us to let you rest. Which we plan to do, of course. She also called me late last night, telling me that you had gone out and weren't back yet. I couldn't believe that you of all people would stay out all night and fall onto the tracks just in time for the first train to arrive."

"Yuuto, you weren't...trying to leave this world behind, were you?"

"...I don't really remember."

I shook my head. It was half-lie, half-truth. My memories of last night's events were still indistinct, but I knew that the moment I leapt in front of the train, I thought to myself that the world would be perfect if I were no longer in it.

Despite that, I was still alive.

Natsuki, perhaps mistaking the shaking of my head as an indication that it hurt, asked,

“Would it be better if we left for now?”

“No, it’s okay. Actually I’d like for you to stay, Natsuki. And you, of course, Shuu.”

Natsuki broke into a smile, the first smile she’d had since she arrived at the hospital. It was a smile that made me feel at peace all the way to the depths of my soul.

“I’m glad that you at least remembered us.”

“Of course I would.”

“We heard from your mother that your memories might be sort of mixed up, so I discussed it for a while with Natsuki.”

Natsuki and Shuu exchanged glances.

“We were worried that you’d forgotten us, so we wanted to make sure that you remembered our names.”

So that’s what it was. At first I’d been puzzled as to why they had been acting so stiffly, but really, the fact was that I, who never loitered around outside late at night, had stayed out until morning and gotten myself nearly run over by a train. Of course they’d all be worried.

“Have I cleared your suspicions, then?”

“Mhm.”

“Yeah, I’m glad you’re okay.”

After that, the three of us dedicated ourselves to eating our way through the cakes and snacks.

This moment was something that I could truly call happiness. The three of us, noisy and lively, feeling like we would stick together forever, transcending any worries about who stuck to whom, who liked whom, who hated whom.

I was, in a way, totally satisfied with the current situation.

"Just here to check up on you."

I braced myself for the arrival of Dr. Maki-chan...nevermind, it was a normal doctor. Just like her, he wore a white coat, but unlike her, he actually gave off a feeling of authority.

After a couple of questions about how I was feeling, he examined my arms and head. There seemed to be no serious problems.

I lay down face-up in bed and closed my eyes.

What should I do now, I wondered. Even if I were to reset once more and return to the platform where I had jumped in front of the train, unless I made some decisive changes, the outcome would remain the same. This I knew from the resets that I had done thus far.

The world would become perfect if I were to disappear, but I couldn't even manage that much.

I heard the door to my room opening, and opened my eyes. Like I'd anticipated, the world had gone monochrome.

"Why the hell are you a nurse now?!"

Instead of a doctor's outfit, Maki-chan walked in dressed as a nurse.

"I thought it'd be nice to switch it up once in a while. Does it look good? Which one's better, the doctor outfit or the nurse one?""I couldn't care less. I'm not into that stuff!"

I raised my voice a bit. I mean, here I was, with all sorts of things to worry about, and she comes sauntering in like it's all a big game. She was just putting me in these monochrome worlds to get a kick out of bothering me, I thought, and heaved out a sigh with each breath I took.

"I just wanted to wear it for a bit...you don't have to give me that look."

She pouted for a few seconds before realizing that yes, she had gone too far, and turned to me imploringly with puppy-dog eyes.

I knew, too, that it was immature to pout about things and stay mad, so I blurted, by way of apology, "Sorry. For yelling at you."

The second I finished talking, Maki-chan's clouded expression brightened, like a switch had been flipped. "I'm sorry too, Yuuto. I didn't know that you liked the doctor outfit better than the nurse one. I'll be sure to wear the doctor one next time!"

She was totally on the wrong track, but it would be a pain to correct her, so I let it slide.

"Your friends came by to visit, right?""Yeah, they did. They're both good friends. I'd like to be with them forever, like how it is now."

Oh. Like how it was now. In which case Natsuki would continue to like Shuu, and would continue to be unable to tell him her feelings, and her illness would continue to get worse. And I would just stand there, unable to do a thing.

That was the reality I faced at that moment. In this not-yet-reset world, not one of my problems had been resolved. Without the button, I could do nothing, and if I were to slip up, I couldn't steer back onto the right path without resetting.

But I would do my best, to, uh...I would...huh? What would I even do my best to do?

"Maki-chan, since you're a god, can't you cure Natsuki's illness?""Does she wish for it to happen? Even if that were the case, I've never met Natsuki-chan before, so I don't think I have any obligation to grant her wishes. Anyway, this world that the two of us are talking in is a world that no one else can see or enter."

I couldn't imagine what was going on in Maki-chan's head for her to flippantly give me such a cruel answer.

As a god, she wouldn't be expected to have any feelings in the first place, but she'd sat in here, laughing and pouting, hadn't she? How could she be so coldhearted towards Natsuki's plightnow ?

".....Hey, Maki-chan, there are many people in this world who wish for things, right? Do you just stand there and worldlessly watch those people?""Well, I'm nothing but a stroke of luck." "You mean like, only people who win the lottery of life will gain happiness?" "Something like that."

Did that even count as a god? No, wait, she never even made the claim that she herself was a god. But someone who was born from the emotions of humans, someone whose purpose is to fulfill wishes—what else could that be, other than a god?

Even assuming that she weren't a god—say, for example, that she were a devil instead, then still, she's at least granted one of my wishes, which made her, in my opinion, better than any of the gods to whom I tossed money into the boxes at shrines but who had not once done a single thing for me. If Maki-chan were to meet Natsuki, would she grant her wish? Should Natsuki offer some money at a shrine and ask Maki-chan for a favor? Should she pray and everything? Ring the shrine bell?** Where did Maki-chan reside, normally? Where was her shrine? Oh, maybe I could bring Natsuki into the monochrome world...well, probably not, so maybe I should set Natsuki and Maki-chan up with each other, and have Natsuki make a wish. Ugh...I couldn't even estimate how likely it was for that to succeed. My brain simply refused to work...!

"Yuuto, does your head hurt?"

Somehow, during course my internal struggle, my hands had reached up to cradle my head between them.

"The doctor said that everything looked fine, right...? In my hippocampus, that is." "That's only what it looks like. But if you look closely, with your heart, then you can see that your hippocampus is damaged." "But the MRI scans showed..." "I'm just warning you here. Your hippocampus is on the verge of breaking. You can still use the reset button, but if you keep resetting any more than you have, you'll never be able to remember or recall anything every again, and just become a soulless husk of a person, a doll." "A soulless husk...a doll....?" "Yuuto, how much of the past can you remember right

now?"".....Even that's hard to tell right now. It's not like I've forgotten things, just that when I try to recall something, my head starts to hurt. I'll be able to figure my memories out when that gets better. I'm taking meds, so it'll be fine, right?"

The innocent air that Maki-chan exuded earlier had now all but disappeared, and her expression darkened considerably.

"Your brain has even forgotten the fact that it has forgotten the past. It thinks that those events could never have happened in the first place."

The cards that she held in her hands were all what seemed to be my memories, fragments of my past that I had absolutely no recollection of. My memories of Natsuki from when we were kids were all surely gone as well.

".....Well, it's no big deal," I muttered, without a hint of putting up any kind of strong front.

"Yuuto...""It doesn't matter. If I can't remember them, it's like they never happened in the first place. Any memory, once truly forgotten, won't even leave a trace to remember. After all, I don't even remember that I've forgotten them..."

It didn't matter, right?

That was enough discussion about my tossing aside the past; wasn't there a future that I needed to save instead? Because of that, although the idea that everything I've done in the past is correct is admittedly patently untrue, isn't it true that they weren't all mistakes, either?

Anyway, I could accept that there were things that I simply could not achieve.

Would you like the golden axe or the silver axe? What is the happiness that you wish to acquire most? —I guess they're pretty different questions, after all. Nevertheless, the happiness that my brother would surely acquire with such deftness was something that I had trouble grasping for. That was all it was.

Nurse Maki-chan was smiling. A white-clad angel**. Or would you have to call her a white-clad god instead?

Or maybe she was a devil, dressed in white?

No, none of those worked. Maki-chan was just Maki-chan, nothing more and nothing less.

Maki-chan was exactly what she was, and I couldn't imagine her as anything beyond that.

The purest existence, an embodiment of purity itself.

Maybe what I'd meant by "perfect and tidy" had been this girl, the epitome of purity.

If that were true, then that would, perhaps, make her the cruelest being of all.



I finally returned to school in late September.

"Hashidate Yuuto will resume his attendance at school, starting today."

My classmates acknowledged the teacher's announcement with nods. I waved at them uncharacteristically, still kind of out of it.

"We have one other announcement. Sugita Natsuki-san?"

"Yes."

Natsuki stood from her seat.

"It's slightly ironic that I'm leaving the day Yuuto comes back, but I'd like to let you all know that starting this afternoon, I will be staying at the hospital as an inpatient."

Upon hearing what she had to say, the classroom descended into chaos.

"I'm sorry for not saying anything about it before. I've been ill for a long time, and my doctor has informed me that it's now time for me to be hospitalised. So I'll do that for a while. It might be for a long time, but I'll be sure to come back."

I was jerked back to reality. Yes, this was really happening.

The cause of Natsuki's illness remained unknown, and her 3-month fate remained sealed. Counting forward three months from mid-July...that meant that she had but one month left to live.

What would she do in the hospital for that one remaining month? Had they found a way to cure her yet? If so, she might make it.

The class, oblivious to her situation, took the announcement lightly, saying, "M'kay, do your best," and laughing through their farewells. Only I knew the truth. She looked healthy at first glance, but I knew she didn't have long to live.

Recalling what I'd said to Maki-chan, I wondered if this final month would continue like how it was now.

Natsuki left school early, before noon.

When school ended, Shuu came up to me, saying,

"Are you going to go see Natsuki?"

"....Yeah."

Shuu stood in the bus headed towards the hospital, gazing outside in silence. I, too, watched the scenery rush by. We were never too fond of spoken

conversation anyway, normally linked by some unspoken thread of communication. But today, even that felt...faint.

We asked the receptionist for Natsuki's room number, and headed for the inpatient ward of the department of internal medicine. Natsuki had a private room.

She brightly greeted us with a full smile.

"That's funny," remarked Shuu. "Are you hiding anything from us, Natsuki? Your sudden hospitalisation is one thing, but having a private room when you're acting like there aren't any serious issues? Now that's unusual."

"Oh, come one, who cares..."

The light dismissal that she chirped in response only served to unsettle him further.

"There's no doubt you're ill, but what I want to know is, why didn't you tell me about it? Aren't we friends?"

".....Friends. That's right, we're friends, yes."

The tone of Natsuki's voice dropped a notch.

"So since we're friends and all, wouldn't you think to confide in me?"
"Well, Yuuto knew."

The conversation was suddenly jerked in my direction, and I fumbled for a reply.

"What's the meaning of this?"
"Ah, well, you see.....that time that I went to the hospital, I bumped into her here, so that's how I came to know about it."

It didn't seem like a good idea to disclose the details of her illness.

"So I was the only one who didn't know. So, what were you diagnosed with?"
"We don't really know."

"Give me a break! What have you guys been doing behind my back this whole time?"

No, that's not what's happening, really.

My knowledge of Natsuki's illness was purely accidental, and she would have

kept it from everyone if she could have. I think she tried especially hard to keep Shuu from finding out.

Point was, Natsuki was going to die, right? In a month?

Was that something so easily confided to others, even close friends?

Furthermore, Shuu was special to Natsuki.

"You don't know anything, so don't go around saying whatever you want."

"Yeah, well the reason I don't know anything is because you never bothered to tell me."

"Like I would tell you these things! Get out of my room!"

"Fine, I will!"

Shuu really did end up leaving the room. I looked over at Natsuki, who looked so lonely, having been left behind and now stuck in the bed.

"Natsuki, I'm sorry,"

"Why are you apologizing?"

I couldn't answer that. I knew that if only I were gone, then the world would be perfect, but I couldn't tell her that.

I didn't want our friendship to become strained like this. I just wanted the three of us to stay friends. Natsuki, Shuu, and I were all at our limits.

The more I thought about it, the less it made sense in my head.

We sat in silence for over ten minutes. Someone knocked at the door, and Natsuki let them in. It was Dr. Kakitagawa.

"Today, I brought someone I wanted to introduce to Sugita-san."

A tall man appeared from behind the doctor. He wore a black jacket and black necktie, and his hair was slicked back in a professional manner, revealing a sharp gaze—

"Meet Hashidate Taishi."

"Taishi!"

"You look well, Yuuto. I didn't know you would be here."

"Hashidate-kun here is going to be my assistant starting today. He'll be contributing to finding the cure for Sugita-san's disease, as well."

My brother was here! If anyone could cure Natsuki, it would be him.

Despite the fact that we hadn't met in years, I still saw the boldness written in his face, and to me, that meant hope.

I left for the roof with my brother.

The last time I had come here was that time with Dr. Kakitagawa.

It was hot up on the roof, but I felt incredibly free.

"Taishi, you'll be able to cure her, right?"

"How much did Dr. Kakitagawa tell you?"

I explained what I knew about Natsuki's illness, about how she had a tumor that would affect her digestive and respiratory systems, the existence of other people with the same illness, and how a cure hadn't been found yet, as well as I could.

"The first death from the disease occurred yesterday."

"Death? You mean....?"

"The number of patients has been increasing. There are no clear symptoms, so diagnosis often comes too late. The one who died yesterday was a 30-year-old salaryman. Being completely healthy otherwise, it never occurred to him to visit the hospital. He coughed up blood in his home, was brought here by the ambulance, and was pronounced dead upon arrival. It was only after they administered an autopsy that signs of illness were found. There will be more patients in the near future. It's a shame that it's fatal."

"No...Dr. Kakitagawa said that he'd find a cure...."

"The research is still ongoing, and we have an understanding of the disease, to a certain extent. A cure has yet to be found. We can slow the progression of the disease by treating its symptoms, but that's all we have for now."

"B-but, you're here to help find a cure, right?"

"Yes, I am. But seeing as I'm not even certified as a doctor, treatment is outside of my jurisdiction. The most I can do here is assist with testing patients. Here, Yuuto, I'll do as much as I can to examine Sugita Natsuki and the others for clues. Then I'll write up a report, and analyze the data. That's my role here."

"O-okay. Got it."

Like I mentioned earlier, my brother was a college student, and only a second-year, at that. The fact that Dr. Kakitagawa had asked for his help despite that showed the trust that he had in my brother's skills. Just by knowing that, you could tell that my brother was incredible.

Everything would be okay. Everything would turn out fine, because Taishi was here now.

A sense of relief spread through my body.

The last thing I asked before we parted was a question that I'd wanted to ask for a long time but had never gotten the chance to do so.

"Hey, Taishi."

"What?"

"Why did you choose to go to university?"

He gave me that bold smirk of his, and answered.

"I wanted to create a perfect world."

Oh, wonderful. My brother was the same as always, perfect and tidy.

Later that day, Taishi drove me home in his car. I hadn't known, but at some point he'd acquired a license and his own car. It was a blue sports car, secondhand, bought cheap from one of his upperclassmen from college. Taishi was, I thought as he handled the sports car with ease, really cool in the simplest of ways.



—

Notes:

** These are all things that are often done at shrines. The money box is called "saisen" if you want to Google it and get a better visual.

** In Japanese, a common word for nurse is 白衣の天使, lit. "white-clad angel," so here's it's not just like a wild metaphor appeared.

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Life Reset Button Novel

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What was this?

Why did I feel so bitter, dammit?

I thought that all I needed was for Natsuki to be happy. For Shuu to be happy.

Dammit, dammit, dammit, dammit.

I could feel tears threatening to spill.

—

Chapter 5: Think Ahead and Deal With It

Part 2

Natsuki's tests continued. She had her blood drawn and was on an antibacterial IV drip practically every day.

"All this, even though I feel perfectly healthy. I wonder if I should make a break for it."

"Don't say stupid stuff like that."

Seeing as I didn't have any club activities, I visited Natsuki in her hospital room most every day. Though she seemed healthy enough, I still couldn't help but notice that she was getting thinner every day. No, even that wasn't quite true—it was more like I forced myself to notice.

Ever since that day, Shuu hadn't visited Natsuki even once.

"My muscles are practically dissolving from me sleeping around all day. On the bright side, it's kind of like a diet, but still, I can feel myself going blobby. Look,

my calves are all squishy now.”

“Don’t stick your bare legs out from under the covers at me.”

“Aw, feeling shy, now? You shouldn’t be thinking lewd thoughts about the legs of a hospital patient.”

“N-no, I was...”

“Actually thinking lewd thoughts?”

“Oh. Kinda...”

“Well, good.”

Having boarded this awkward train of conversation, I found it difficult to segue onto the next topic. This was all Natsuki’s fault.

She suddenly blurted, “You know, I’m getting weaker by the day.”

“For some reason, it doesn’t really show on the outside, but the doctors told me that my strength will suddenly decrease.”

“Well, I mean, you’ve got a tumor. They can’t perform surgery on it?”

“I asked that, too...they said they can’t. It’s not like a normal tumor, it’s more like there are these tiny little ones dotted around everywhere, so it’s not like you can just go in and remove it.”

“Even so, they could at least...!”

“It was my choice. If I’m going to die, I’d rather go without having scars.”

“Don’t say things like that.”

“...I guess you’re right.”

Her reason to leave her body unscarred was probably something to do with Shuu. You could say that it was beyond cruel for her to tell that to me, the one who had once confessed to her, but on the other hand, I was the only one to whom she could speak frankly about her illness.

I took in her words silently, slowly digesting them, with no intention of telling anyone else. These very words might give me an upset stomach later, but if this was my role, then so be it.

I saw the door to the room open just a crack. A little girl peeked in, eyeing us curiously.

“Come in, Serina-chan.”

At Natsuki’s invitation, the child opened the door, revealing a pajama-clad girl

who looked to be in about third grade.

"Is he your boyfriend?" the girl asked.

"Nope~"

That hurt. It was the truth, though.

"Is she a patient, too?" I asked.

"Yeah...she has the same illness. She's one of the kids who I saved during the station fire incident a while ago."

"Yep! Natsuki-chan is Serina's hero! She was super cool!! She went all Pshhhh!!!! with the white smoky stuff!"

"Smoky stuff? Oh, with the fire extinguisher."

"She was super super into it!"

"Yeah, well, I kind of got overexcited."

The fire back then had been threatening to spiral out of control, so no wonder Natsuki had gone above and beyond.

In doing so, she had become this child's hero.

"Wouldn't have expected anything less," I chuckled to myself. Natsuki heard me, though.

"What?"

"Didn't you want to become a superhero? I guess you are one now."

"N-no, wait, I never said that, I'm not a little boy."

"Oh, yes you did."

"Natsuki-chan's my hero!"

Faced with Serina's boundless enthusiasm, Natsuki couldn't help but to smile warmly and nod her assent.

October arrived, and Natsuki's strength rapidly decreased. The number of strange machines present in her room slowly grew. There were generally 2 IVs attached to Natsuki at any given time.

To tell the truth, I was terrified.

Before she was hospitalised, she had been the picture of health, and I always assumed that as long as she stayed in the hospital, she would make a complete

recovery.

Now, that thought seemed nothing more than a fanciful delusion, as Natsuki's condition grew worse by the day.

There were more and more people staying in the ward suffering from the same disease.

It seemed like they were collecting all the people with Natsuki's disease in this hospital, for some reason.

The second person who'd died was an elderly person, 82 years old, and the third victim—not a person, per se—had been a pet poodle.

Having arrived at this stage of outbreak, the people in charge decided to give an official announcement about this mysterious disease, by way of Associate Professor Kakitagawa holding a press conference. Natsuki and I watched it on broadcast relay from her hospital room.

"We are currently in discussion with the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare on this subject. Furthermore, we have, at this time, isolated the virus that causes the disease. This virus's infectious capacity is relatively low, and we have established that it is incapable of airborne transmission. There are some cases we have found where transmission was made by direct contact, but these cases are in the minority. There are currently 24 cases in this hospital. Two have passed away. Risk of infection seems unrelated to age or gender. We are collaborating with the police in an attempt to identify the origin of the disease, but as of now, our top priority is finding a cure."

"Dr. Kakitagawa, I've heard that you are a biotechnology major who is currently working at Kouga University. Is there any possibility of your biotechnology research becoming involved?"
"If we can utilize biotechnology to pick out a large number of targets, then I'm sure we can work more easily with the tools we have. The chances seem slim, but we are still exploring this possibility."

"You mentioned that there are quite a few people who are infected. What is the means by which the disease is transmitted?"
"It's unmistakable that this disease has a very low infectious capacity. By altering the environment and temperature, we can manipulate its infectious capacity in

an upward direction. It is a great shame to have to say this, but this is all of the information we have so far.”

The Dr. Kakitagawa on the television screen had, indeed, the air of a doctor on the side of justice, one who was fighting with all his power against an incurable disease. That was partially due to his statement that there was little risk of contagion, as well as the fact that the purpose of the broadcast had been to try and lessen panic. The doctor was good at this kind of thing.

Natsuki sat unmoving, her eyes still glued to the screen. She didn’t say a word.

Just then, I heard a noise from the hall. Upon opening the door, a familiar set of pajamas. It was girl from before, collapsed face-down on the floor.

“Serina-chan!”

“Natsuki, call the nurse!”

“Got it!”

When I scooped the little girl up into my arms, repositioning her to make it easier for her to breathe, I noticed blood on my palm. There was blood was smeared all over my hands.

The little girl coughed violently in my arms, and I rubbed her back soothingly. She coughed up a large amount of blood, mixed with phlegm and stomach acid.

Serina continued coughing up blood.

There was now red spilling everywhere around me on the bed.

“No-!!”

Natsuki’s shriek wrenched me back to reality. The girl still lay in my arms, blood all around her mouth.

A doctor and nurse burst into the room, whisking us away.

The sensation of blood on my hand refused to disappear.

I sat in a folding chair in Natsuki’s hospital room. Natsuki had flung herself into the bed face-down, sobbing. I had no words with which to comfort her. It took everything I had in me just to keep myself together.

Natsuki continued crying on the bed, her voice muffled by the pillow. It didn't look like she was going to stop anytime soon.

Just imagining Natsuki in that awful state made my heart clench. Was this it? Was this how it would go? Would her final moments be full of coughing up blood and writhing in pain? Why did this have to happen?

"...I want to die," mumbled Natsuki, her voice thick with tears. "I'd rather overdose on a whole bunch of pills than die like that."

"Don't say things like that. Dr. Kakitagawa and Taishi are going to find you a cure, no matter what."

"And what if I die before they find one? I'm scared. I just want to get it over with."

No. That was all wrong. I knew it was wrong, but what could I say to Natsuki at a time like this?

"I see. Say, Natsuki, Do you remember what happened in elementary school? When we played with that second-grader in the park?"

"....Yeah."

She answered with her face still buried in the bed, not even turning her face to speak.

"You delivered a full-on body slam to that guy to protect me and Takeru, the second-grader. I thought it was the greatest thing in the world. I wanted to become like you. That's the strong Natsuki who I know can keep on living."

"Yuuto, sorry, but...you won't like what I'm about to say," Natsuki interrupted. I leaned forward in my chair, hoping to catch each muffled word that left her mouth.

"Don't you remember what happened after that?"

"Huh?"

"That second-grader, Takeru, was abused later, by his real father. The person who had come to pick him up was his father's elder brother, his uncle, who had come to rescue Takeru from his father. But we got in the uncle's way...in the end, Takeru was taken away by his father."

"That's can't be right."

I had no memory of such a thing, no recollection of that development ever

happening.

“One week after that, Takeru was handed over to a child consultation center to be taken care of, and it was quite the scandal...”

“...I had no idea.”

I really had no idea. I couldn’t remember a thing.

Why couldn’t I?

“I don’t want to bring up bad memories like that. I’ve always questioned myself, deep in my heart—why couldn’t I save Takeru-kun that day? Back then, I had no way of finding out what happened afterwards, and so I’ve never been able to uncover the exact details of the events that happened later...”

I sat silent, simply listening to her.

“Bringing up this topic after all this time is so painful. Just being here with you and thinking back to that time is painful.”

No!

I just...perfection...no!

I no longer cared about myself. All that I wanted was for Natsuki to live in happiness.

That was all I needed.

But as I was right now, I wasn’t good for anything.

I couldn’t even comfort her properly...

I persuaded Shuu to visit Natsuki’s hospital room a few days later. However, when we got there, we were met with a “No Visitors Allowed” sign taped to her door. We sat in the visitors’ waiting room, playing on our cellphones to pass the time. The “No Visitors Allowed” sign gave me a bad premonition, but I couldn’t bring myself to put my suspicions to words.

After about an hour had passed, the nurse approached us.

“Her condition’s stable, so the doctor will let you two speak with her, but only briefly.”

When I stepped into the room, the first thing I noticed was that the number of machines had once again risen since yesterday, and so had the number of tubes attached to Natsuki.

Natsuki lay face-up in her bed, breathing softly.

"She's doing fine right now. You can just sit by her badside," said the nurse, kindly.

Natsuki's eyes were only half-open. She was staring at the ceiling, but her gaze flickered to us as we drew closer. She moved her lips, and then rasped out her words with a long sigh.

"It's painful...why do I feel so bitter..."

Those were the exact words she had once told me. The words she had flung at me, after the thousands of loops that I created stopped her from getting closer to Shuu.

I clenched my fist. Unable to bear looking straight at her face, I directed my gaze to the air above her.

What was I doing? Nothing had changed. I'd done nothing but stand around idly and watch.

I should have at least been able save Natsuki from this pain.

"Shuu."

I barely managed to squeeze the words from my throat.

"I know that Natsuki confessed to you. And I know that you answered that you wanted the three of us to stay together. So, Shuu—"

"What?"

"I want you to respond to Natsuki's feelings."

"But I want the three of us..."

"No! This is different! I'm a good-for-nothing! You're the one she wants, Shuu. Do you intend to just watch her struggle with her feelings for you as she...gets taken away? She's important to you, right? I know that she is. So, Shuu...I want you to accept her feelings."

"...Are you okay with that, Yuuto?"

"I want you to do it. Please."

Shuu gently took Natsuki's hand, the one that didn't have an IV drip in it. Her hand squeezed back.

"Shuu...I guess I still have feelings for you."

He answered, his gaze never straying from Natsuki's face.

"...So do I. I can finally admit it—I like you. A lot."

It's fine, I'm fine with all this, I convinced myself.

I left the room, trying my best not to make a sound.

Natsuki and Shuu loved each other, and I was nothing but a pest. We were still friends, but we couldn't keep walking the same path that we had taken before.

I didn't mind at all. This was yet another answer that I had been searching for all this time.

In the end, on the day Shuu and I visited Natsuki, I only showed up to her room at the very beginning, and spent the remainder of the time sitting alone in the visitors' waiting room. I wanted to let them have some time to themselves.

I had no knowledge of what they said or did during that time. Those minutes, spent hidden from my eyes, were set aside for Natsuki to enjoy what little time she had left as happily as she could.

I sat on the sofa in the visitors' waiting room and fiddled with my cellphone.

What was this?

Why did I feel so bitter, dammit?

I thought that all I needed was for Natsuki to be happy. For Shuu to be happy.

Dammit, dammit, dammit, dammit.

I could feel tears threatening to spill.

It hurt. I felt so hurt. My head, my eyes, my throat, heart, stomach, legs, my fingertips, they all hurt. Hurt so much that I just wanted to lay right down on the sofa and let myself slip into unconsciousness.

I held my knees to my chest, and felt the wetness of my tears seep through the

cloth.

My tears wouldn't stop. I ran the back of my hand over my eyes to wipe them, again and again, yet they wouldn't stop.

I clamped my hand over my mouth.

The ringing in my ears persisted. The sound prevented me from thinking clearly.

I felt like my emotions would all come spilling out—I wanted to scream, even if people looked at me like I was crazy. I wanted to scream and barrel through the halls of the hospital.

I want someone to look at me.

Please, look at me, I wanted to cry out.

I wanted someone to understand—to see how, no matter how many times I reset, perfection was still out of reach; how I couldn't even manage to find my own happiness—I wanted someone to understand my pain.

Listen to me.

Look at me.

Understand me.

This was nothing but my own selfishness, a tantrum thrown by the little boy inside my head.

I was bitter, after all. No matter what I did, I still felt bitter.

Help me. Someone, save me from this fate.

I just wanted to be happy.

I liked myself.

I liked Natsuki—loved her.

I liked Shuu. I liked them both.

Their happiness was supposed to be my salvation.

Natsuki was happy, Shuu was happy. That had been my one and only wish, but...

The tears overflowed, and still would not stop.



Finally, the time came.

It was around noon, on a Monday.

Shuu and I had both been in class as usual when the head teacher ran down the hall and burst in through the door.

"I've just received news from her mother that Sugita Natsuki has passed away."

Shuu and I both stood up before the teacher finished his sentence. We picked up our bags with our wallets inside and practically flew from the room. We both knew, without saying anything, that we were headed for the hospital.

The bus ride was excruciatingly slow. I could see that Shuu was trembling. I had never seen him so agitated in my life.

We lurched into the hospital room, only to find that the bed was empty.

"Yuuto! I'm going to head to my place."

"Okay. Here, take this."

I threw my wallet to him. Our wallets combined would likely hold enough cash for him to take a taxi. Shuu accepted the wallet and nodded, then ran out.

It occurred to me as I watched him leave that it would cost just as much for both of us to sit in the same taxi as it would if he took the taxi alone. Even at times like this, I managed to be an idiot.

I really was an idiot.

I stared blankly at the now-unoccupied bed. The sheets were fresh, so there was no trace of anyone having been there at all.

Had Natsuki passed away without feeling any pain? Or had she gone violently, coughing up blood?

I prayed that it was the former.

"Uu...gh....Natsu...ki...uwaaa...Na...tsuki..."

I hugged my knees tight to my chest, stifling my sobs. Then I bent down and rested my head against the bed, and took to pummelling the mattress with my fists.

How could I let this happen? Why did Natsuki have to die?

Why?!

“...Yuuto-kun,” I heard a voice behind me say. I replied without even turning around.

“...Dr. Kakitagawa...You said you would save Natsuki...”

“I’m sorry.”

“Taishi and you...both...”

“*Do you really think you have nothing to do with this?*”

“...Excuse me?”

I raised my tear-streaked face at the doctor’s vexing question.

“*Do you really have nothing to do with Hashidate-kun’s actions?*”

“What do you mean?”

“...There’s something I need to talk to you about. The timing’s unfortunate, but please wipe your tears and come to the roof with me.”

I nodded, listlessly.

There was a slight wind up on the roof. The clear autumn sky stretched far above me.

The doctor walked up to the railing that enclosed the roof, and leaned on it.

“Mind if I smoke?”

I didn’t have the strength to answer.

“The death of a patient always really makes me want to smoke.”

He pursed his lips and tilted his head up, blowing smoke into the air. For someone who said that there was something he needed to talk to me about, he sure didn’t look like he was in a hurry to say anything.

My patience was starting to wear thin. Natsuki was dead, and he just wanted

to stand around like it was none of his business?

"What did you want to talk about? If you've got nothing to say, I'd like to go home."

His face suddenly took on a expression of deep thought, and he let out a sigh before speaking in a quiet, but clearly audible voice.

"The one who made the virus...was me."

"What?!"

I didn't understand.

"Wh-what do you..."

"The virus that has claimed victim after victim was made in my own laboratory."

He calmly snuffed his cigarette in his portable ashtray.

All the blood suddenly rushed to my head, and I lunged at Dr. Kakitagawa.

"Wh-why did you infect Natsuki with it, then? Why?!" I demanded, glaring at him.

"I'm really sorry. Apologizing won't solve the problem, I know...But I knew that I would have to take responsibility sooner or later. Actually, though, there's something that I must ask of you."

"What do you want?"

"Please stop Hashidate Taishi—please stop your brother."

"Huh?"

What was he talking about?

"Why him?"

"He tricked me. No, he tricked everyone. I had intended to wash my hands of the matter, to destroy the entire experiment. But then, he...he got..."

As he spoke, I could see his will cracking, like a dam at its bursting point. His voice trembled.

"That virus was made completely by accident..."

I stood in silence, waiting to hear what he would say next.

From what I could tell, at first, it was just an experiment to create a virus with

low infectious capacity. It was just something for his thesis, totally useless and meant to be discarded afterwards, but then Danan Pharmaceutical, one of the major American pharmaceutical companies, requested to do co-research with Dr. Kakitagawa's lab. The grant money made it hard for his struggling lab to refuse the offer.

At first, research went smoothly. However, it turned out that Danan's goal was to create a virus with a low infectious capacity but a high fatality rate—over 90%. They wanted to use it as a bioweapon, for the purpose of assassinations. The most worrisome part was its low infectious capacity—in order for it to infect someone, the temperature needed to be raised to rather high levels, and test showed that the slightest error in the environment prevented the virus from spreading, even though direct contact.

At around that time, my brother started showing up at Dr. Kakitagawa's lab.

Fired up at the prospect of taking such a kind, ideal student under his wing, the doctor trusted him immediately.

"On the first day of school, someone at school died. That night, I planned to get the virus and all of the data associated with it out of the school and dispose of it somewhere safe. I didn't want to dig myself any deeper."

"So then, what does Taishi have to do with..."

"I can't drive, so I asked him to help me transport it, but...he betrayed me, and made off with the virus."

"Hold on for a second. Taishi would never do anything like that."

"You may think that, but he's the only one who could have done it, as far as I know. He took it and ran off, somehow slipping through my fingers."

Dr. Kakitagawa lost his composure by then. He pulled out another cigarette, despite having just finished one, and tried to light it. The wind must have picked up quite a bit, because his lighter kept going out. Eventually, he managed to light his cigarette, the trembling of his hands making the flame flicker just the slightest bit.

If Taishi were betrayed and cornered like this, he still wouldn't lose him composure, I thought to myself.

"Do you remember the fire that broke out at the station while people were

inside?"

Of course I remembered. I was there.

"...That was his doing. He created that situation in order to infect the people inside. He forced the station to become an airtight container, and using explosives, caused a fire in order to raise the temperature inside. Those were the optimal conditions for the virus to spread. Then he let the virus loose inside."

"No, you can't be—"

"Every single person with the illness had also been trapped in the concourse that day."

"Eh...?"

It made sense. Natsuki and Serina-chan had both been there.

But that didn't necessarily mean that...

"We gathered all of the victims in this hospital. Of course, when it was discovered that the cause was this virus, the police and counter-terrorism division were sent to try and find the origin of the outbreak. I didn't want to cause a panic at the press conference, so I didn't reveal everything, but it's clear to me that eventually your brother and I will be exposed as the creators. It's unheard of, unthinkable even, for a Japanese university undergraduate to commit such acts of bioterrorism on his own. Naturally, I won't be spared."

But...

"But that day, Taishi knew that I was going to be at the station. He would never think to spread the virus there. If he really were involved in that terrorist attack, then he would have stopped me from going to the station."

"...You don't know your brother very well, then."

Huh...?

What was he trying to say?

I didn't know my brother very well?

What the hell do you think you know about him, then?!

I wanted to lunge at him, to scream in his face, but I managed to hold back.

"Hashidate Taishi—your brother—is a deviant."

He turned to face me, his eyes unfocused. “Please. Stop him. He has more up his sleeve. He still has that virus. There’s nothing more that I can do...”

Stop him, he said?

Dr. Kakitagawa slumped down into a sitting position, as if his very will were crumbling. I looked down, deep in thought.

It made no sense.

No sense at all.

What would Taishi have to gain from spreading this disease?

There was no motive.

But if everything the doctor said was true, then Natsuki contracted the disease that day at the station. If only I hadn’t asked her to meet me at the station—no, that wasn’t enough. Unless I did something to thwart the incident as a whole, the course of history would simply return to what was happening now.

Think. Think hard.

“But, if I reset again...on the other hand, Natsuki...”

I muttered to myself, my head hanging.

Dr. Kakitagawa looked up at me pleadingly.

Underneath that clear, sunny sky, strong winds battered the rooftop.

My mind was about to break, in accordance with all of the resets I had done. Would it really just stop working?

Beyond that was nothingness.

Days filled with blank space flew by, falling apart one by one as my life unfolded in my head.

Not remembering anything, not recalling anything—just passively existing, a hollow human-shaped container.

It was frightening, but Natsuki was—

Natsuki was dead.

In all of my memories, Natsuki was smiling. That smile was for me, as a friend. Even though I wanted to be so much more.

I wanted her to keep smiling. If I could help Natsuki and Shuu live out their lives in happiness, then my own life was a small price to pay.

I had already died that day, at the station platform.

If I had to give my life to save Natsuki, then so be it.

I clenched my hands and drew in a deep breath, then turned to face the sky as I shouted.

“Maki-chan!”

Did she hear me? Was she even there?

“I don’t care if I gave up every single brain cell I have! I want to reset one more time!”

It didn’t matter if my brain stopped working after that one reset. I would rebuild my life one last time with every drop of strength I could muster.

It didn’t matter anymore.

I took out the reset button, and held it above my head.

Maki-chan, thank you for the advice. Thank you for giving me the reset button.

I’ll use the strength that you lent me, the strength of my wish, to save my beloved friends.

I opened my eyes, gazing straight at the sky. One finger pressed down on the button.

—Reset.

The world wavered. This time, it pitched wildly back and forth, and my vision multiplied, layers sliding over each other.

“This is the last game, you know,” said Maki-chan. Her voice reverberated through the air.

—

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Chapter 6: My Dream for the Future...What Was It Again?

Part 1

I stood in front of the vending machine of the station, gripping a can of black coffee tightly in my hand.

What thoughts had rushed through my mind the last time I stood here?

I couldn't remember, but then again, if it wasn't necessary to recall those kinds of things, then you could say that those memories themselves were unnecessary anyway.

That was what I believed. I had no evidence to back me up; it was a simple leap of faith.

And if the proof that I was looking for was buried in those forgotten memories, then so be it. My faith was all I needed to push forward.

Natsuki wasn't here yet.

This was where the worlds would diverge.

I gulped down what little coffee remained in the can.

My head felt strangely clear, and I felt confident going forward. It might've been because this was my last chance—you know what they say, humans always want to go out with a bang.

I had faith.

I had a goal.

There was no more looking back, only forwards. That way, I could find the strength in myself to go forth.

The final stage of the Last Game was Hachiougi Station. It wouldn't be enough just to get Natsuki out of harm's way. I needed to stop the incident from happening in the first place.

In order to do that, I needed to stop my brother—or whomever it was; I still wasn't convinced that Taishi was the culprit—from spreading the virus. And if found that it was Taishi after all, I wanted to know his true motives.

If the virus were to get out, it wouldn't be impossible for Natsuki to eventually get infected with it again. The law of cause and effect still governed these things, despite how far back I reset.

I sat myself down on the bench by the fountain, watching the people around me. There weren't so many people that one could call it a crowd. It was, after all, a regular weekday in the suburbs.

To occupy myself, I went through the list of tools I had at my disposal in my head.

The only thing I had was information—information about the future.

The culprit would somehow gain control to all of the facilities within the station. Then they would turn the concourse into an closed system and release the virus.

If it really were my brother, what strategies could I use?

I stood up from the bench.

My destination was the multi-story parking garage adjacent to the station. It had one underground level and three above-ground ones.

Any reasonable criminal would park their getaway car on ground level, I reasoned. However, assuming that my brother was the culprit, the underground level seemed more likely. If he parked it above ground, the explosions would get

dust on his car, and he hated getting his car dirty.

Even in the dim light of the parking structure, I could make out the blue sports car almost immediately. I checked the license plate number as well. It was definitely Taishi's car.

My brother, who had no valid reason I knew of, no necessity for him to be here, was definitely here.

To commit a crime. Maybe.

It was a difficult thought. I wouldn't believe that he was the perpetrator unless I talked to him face-to-face.

There didn't appear to be anyone in the car. I checked that there were no other people I could see in the parking garage, then approached the car slowly. I pulled on the handles, just in case, but they were locked, just as I expected. So was the trunk. I tried to steal a peek inside the windows, but it was too dark for me to see anything. There was a red cylinder lying in the back seat, barely visible.

I tried putting myself in Taishi's shoes. If I were my perfect brother, what would I do next? He certainly wouldn't take all of the virus with him, in case the plan were to fail. On the other hand, there was nowhere he could store it safely, other than this car. At any rate, the only people who knew that this car was here were Taishi and myself. Perhaps Dr. Kakitagawa had some sort of inkling about it, but either way, he had his hands tied right now. That much I knew.

I exited the parking lot, now on the search for my brother. In order to familiarize myself with the building exterior, I circled around the station once.

The first floor of the station building housed the train platforms, the second floor was the concourse and ticket gates, and the third and fourth floor were an atrium of sorts. There was an assortment of stores scattered on the third and fourth floors, and you could look down at the concourse from the windows of the small restaurants on the third floor. In order to prevent accidents, there was strong glass paneling installed.

I could see the building's air-conditioning units installed on the western exterior of the building. They seemed to be just near the rooftop. From what I

could tell from the ground, they looked to be just big enough for someone to hide behind.

I went up to the fourth floor and consulted the directory on the wall, then headed towards the employees-only door. After looking around to make sure the area was clear, I walked through the door, and opened the door to the roof.

The wind bit at my skin as I climbed outside. I looked around me, then dropped my gaze to my feet.

Someone—my brother, perhaps—had been here.

There was an air-conditioning unit installed every few meters, exhaust port pointing upwards. There were pipes running all over the ground, but not so many that I couldn't make my way across the roof. I gingerly stepped wherever there was space, my eyes darting left and right to check my surroundings.

I could see someone's head pop up from behind the main outdoor fan unit up ahead.

As I drew closer, my breath caught in my throat.

The figure of the person was one that I'd seen many times. Taishi.

He was so absorbed in whatever he was doing that he failed to notice my presence. There was a silver briefcase and various tools scattered at his feet.

“Taishi...”

I called out to him, as if this were any other, ordinary situation.

He looked behind him in surprise, his expression undecipherable, but after a moment, he flashed me his usual gentle smile. “Oh, it’s you, Yuuto.”

He stopped what he was doing and turned to face me.

I could see a bomb behind him. It was nestled in the vent of the AC unit. That unit was where the air ducts converged, I guessed. He would start a fire in the duct and let it travel down to the concourse.

“...You. What are you doing here?”

He took the words right out of my mouth.

“...Uh, well, I kind of got lost. I was supposed to meet up with someone,” I said,

with a laugh that sounded far too nervous. I couldn't think on my feet like this.

It was probably my hippocampus' fault that I couldn't think of a better answer. Well, it didn't matter what I answered, anyway. I just needed to keep talking and use this time to decide what my next move would be.

"You're the last person I expected to see up here, Taishi. What brings you to the roof on this fine day?"

As I spoke, I drew closer to him, one step at a time...

"Taishi, what are you doing here?"

"...Yuuto, I want you to go down the first floor. I'll be right behind you."

This was the first time I had ever seen him flustered like this. He had never evaded any question of mine before.

"What are you doing here?"

I got even closer.

"...Yuuto, stop!"

Taishi's expression as he shouted at me was one that I had never seen him make before. He had always been cool and calculating, smirking boldly no matter what problems he was faced with.

"What's wrong, Taishi? Let's go home. Together."

"Yuuto..."

Tears had somehow made their way down my cheeks. I didn't want to cry in front of my brother, but I couldn't help it. He was the one who had spread the virus, the one who had snatched Natsuki's innocent life away.

"Taishi, please, just stop this..."

"Yuuto, you..."

I clung to my brother, still crying.

Since I was being such a crybaby, might as well put it to some persuasive use, I thought to myself.

My brother was not usually someone to be moved by tears. He was constant and perfect, someone who would never abandon such painstakingly thought-out

plans after investing so much time in them. He wouldn't just stop everything he had done so far for the sake of someone crying and clinging to him, even if that someone was his little brother.

But right now, he was far from his usual self. His perfect plans had been flung into disarray by me—by noise that he had not accounted for. I was the only one who was capable of taking advantage of his loss of composure to scatter uncertainty throughout his plans.

What next?

My brain felt hazy. I couldn't think straight.

How could I stop Taishi, how could I stop the explosions, the infection, everything...?

"I came here to stop you."

I was still crying.

If I thought just a little more, I might be able do something to gain the upper hand.

I fell to my knees before my brother.

"...Yuuto, what are you asking me?"

His voice was so gentle. The second I heard it, I almost reverted to my normal self, accepting everything my brother said and blindly chasing after him.

I placed my hands on the ground and bowed my head deeply.

"I beg you, Taishi, don't spread the virus, please!"

I couldn't see his reaction.

After a moment of stillness, he spoke.

"...It's already too late for that, Yuuto."

Too late, huh.

So you admitted it, Taishi.

His goal had been a perfect world. In my desire to chase after my brother, I had, in effect, also taken up that goal.

In the perfect world that I wanted, I did not exist.

But in Taishi's perfect world, it was the people around him who did not exist.

That was the difference between him and me. That was where our paths of thinking diverged.

My perfect world and his perfect world were entirely different things.

I was no longer capable of chasing after my brother, and I no longer wanted to.

All I wanted was a world where Natsuki could be happy.

A world where I didn't exist, where the person I loved and my best friend could live in happiness.

—Goodbye, Taishi.

I spotted a screwdriver on the ground. It had mostly likely been used to set up the bomb.

I picked it up and stood up straight, facing my brother.

"What are you doing?"

He didn't move an inch.

"...I'm prepared to die here. If you won't go down without a fight, then, well, I'm willing to go down with you."

"Heh..."

There it was, that bold laugh of his.

He took a single step forward towards me, letting the tip of the screwdriver barely touch his torso.

"Taishi..."

"What're you gonna do, Yuuto? Stab me?"

I gripped the screwdriver harder, my knuckles white. The tighter I gripped, the more my hand trembled.

"Can I be stabbed by the likes of you?"

My palm was sweating so much that I expected to see it dripping to the floor any second. I repositioned my grip on the handle over and over. If I wanted to

stab him, all I had to do was push my arm forward with some power. If I did, the bombs, the virus, the fire, and Natsuki's death would all be stopped...

Yet I could do nothing but hold the screwdriver in my hand and glare into my brother's eyes.

"...There's a big difference between killing yourself and killing other people, right?"

"Taishi, are you saying that you...can kill people...?"

"The most important tool when trying to accomplish something is conviction. If you have conviction, if you believe in yourself, then you can bring yourself to do whatever is necessary to finish the job."

As he spoke, he turned his back to me as if I were just an insignificant bystander, took out his phone, and tapped the screen.

I could hear the sound of bells ringing. The shutters inside the building were about to close.

It was about to begin. There was no stopping it now.

"I have to make the world perfect."

Of course. He had always wanted just that, a perfect and tidy world.

"There are so many people who would be unnecessary in a perfect world. I have to sweep the dirt away, don't you understand?"

Was this really what it took to create the perfect world that he envisioned?

"I shall cleanse the world of its imperfection!"

I had come all this way, admiring my brother, wanting to become like him. I wanted to make a perfect world, in a way. But I couldn't follow my brother any more. He had gone too far, wanted too much perfection.

It was all wrong...

Taishi had gone mad.

That, or his thought process was so complex that it exceeded my comprehension abilities, and I was but taking him for a madman. At the very least, I knew for sure that the world reflected in my brother's eyes was not the

same world that I envisioned.

"The ignorant masses of this world, Yuuto, don't understand a single thing. What I'm building is something that transcends their imaginations. It's beyond their comprehension. Some day, perhaps, they will understand. But right now, they will all be sacrifices for this new world. And you, Yuuto, are one of them."

Me...?

"And my own world's most glaring flaw was having an ignorant little brother like you in my life."

Did Taishi really think of me like that...?

"I have had to deal with your irritating presence for nearly all my life... You, lacking as you were in fundamental skills, decided to follow in my footsteps despite your shortcomings. Your attempts to imitate me were nothing but a nuisance. Whenever you came to talk to me, it was all silly questions with obvious answers. Your little romance? Worthless. So incredibly worthless. People caught up with things like that are going to be useless in building a perfect world. That's why I'm going to give you, and that girl you like so much, a golden opportunity to be noble sacrifices in my experiments. That's the only use for human garbage like you. It'll be your greatest contribution to the world."

"So that's why you...?" My voice trembled with rage. "So that's why you did all that to Natsuki? For your little experiment?"

I didn't care what he said about me. I already knew I was an ignorant brother, a fool who had to bust his brain to pieces just to be useful to the perfect world. But getting Natsuki involved was unforgivable. Speaking badly of her was unforgivable.

Taishi's gaze seemed to pierce right through my heart. Anyone else might have seen this and thought that he was being sympathetic, but I knew better than that. The person reflected in his eyes was not his little brother, merely an annoying existence, akin to a fly. He didn't see me as anything bigger than an insect. Well, one could even show sympathy towards insects. No, I wasn't even a bug, just a whining speck of noise.

"There are too many people in this world who were not chosen—and by that, I

mean people like you. Ignorant fools. Do you want to become like me? *Can* you? I am one of the chosen, favored by the gods.”

By the gods?

Taishi? Favored by the gods?

I threw back my head and laughed. It was hilarious, so hilarious, that for a second, I forgot why I had come up here.

“Why are you laughing?”

I was laughing so hard that I could not give an immediate answer. I kept chortling to myself, until he lost his patience.

“Yuuto...”

He glared at me with burning hatred in his eyes.

Taishi...hated me? Did that mean that he regarded me as human, even just a little...?

I laughed until I could laugh no more, and choked on my breath, coughing.

Then I adjusted my breathing back to normal, and glared back at my brother.

“...I was laughing because I found it funny. You know what’s funny? You saying those things, despite having never met a god in your life.”

“What did you just say?”

“You know nothing of the gods, Taishi! The gods are capricious and cruel and like to pull pranks and childish enough to cosplay and also maybe kinda sorta cute, nothing like what you think they are! Favored by the gods? Don’t make me laugh! I’m the one who’s favored by the gods!”

Taishi took a step back, and placed one finger on the smartphone.

I shifted my grip on the screwdriver and charged at him.

That phone was the key. It controlled when the explosions would occur in the concourse.

I rammed the screwdriver upwards, then once again as Taishi threw his head back to dodge. My next move was a downwards swing aimed at the phone in his hand.

The tip of the screwdriver snagged in the sleeve of Taishi's jacket.

He leapt back, holding the phone high above his head.

"Don't come any closer, or I'll set them all off."

We were right next to one of the bombs.

"If you do that, then you'll go flying, too."

"Have you counted how many bombs there are?"

His finger hovered above the phone screen.

I felt vibrations from under my feet, and heard a faraway *boom*.

"The bombs aren't strong enough to kill people. They're just enough to cause a bit of a fire, to create the optimal environment for the virus to spread."

Taishi's fingers pressed the buttons on the screen, one after another, and the vibrations continued. A small blaze burst to life from the external air condition unit.

...If I went to rescue Natsuki now, I might be able to help her get away unscathed. That would be enough to veer history off its course. I could create a world where Natsuki was safe. I could, it wouldn't guarantee anything. I still wouldn't be able to stop the spread of the virus.

I took out the reset button, and held it above my head in an imitation of my brother.

"What is that? A self-destruct switch?" His expression didn't change at all, like he was making fun of me.

"Sorry, but I'm going to make this all so this never happened."

"What?"

"This thing was given to me by a god. When I press the button, I can reset time. With this, I'm going to screw up your plans. Consider it a favor."

Hearing that, he cackled in derision.

"Whatever you're panning on doing, it's stupid, I can tell you that. You're powerless to do anything."

"Taishi, there are gods in this world. They're always watching us. Sometimes, under the guise of granting our wishes, they'll sprinkle some chaos in our lives

for their own amusement. But I know now that I was given this button for this moment. I'll sacrifice myself to reset life and save both Natsuki and you."

"Yuuto, what can you even do at this poi—"

I pressed the button without even letting him finish his sentence.

—Reset!

It appeared as though I was no longer capable of resetting with accuracy.

Whether it was the fault of a weak wish or my atrophied hippocampus, it was undeniable that I was unable to jump back to exactly the time I wanted. The time I arrived at was much more recent than I'd anticipated.

I'd intended to go to a point before Taishi had entered the parking lot, but instead, I ended up on the roof. I landed right as Taishi was setting off all the bombs with his phone.

Why had I gone back only a few minutes?!

"The bombs aren't strong enough to kill people. They're just enough to cause a bit of a fire, to create the opt—"

I've heard you say that already!!

"Sorry, Taishi! I gotta go!"

—Reset!

I arrived in the parking garage, after Taishi had left to set up the bombs. The blue car was parked neatly between the white lines.

It appeared to be approximately the same time as the last time I'd arrived here, but now that I knew the way, if I got the roof immediately, I could get myself a few extra minutes. I had to somehow get the phone away from his and stop the explosions.

But what if the bombs had timers? Then I would still be unable to rescue Natsuki when the fires broke out.

I arrived at the rooftop, my thoughts still in disarray.

I confronted my brother once more, and was once again unable to stop the bombs from going off.

—Dammit! Reset!

I arrived in the parking garage again.

The second I touched down, I was hit with such intense vertigo that I collapsed.

My head was spinning.

Huh? Why was I here?

No no no, you got this, you came here to rescue Natsuki.

How?

The more I tried to think, the more my brother's voice resounded in my head, obstructing my thoughts.

"Yuuto, what can you even do—"

His words from when I pressed the button whirled around in my brain.

What could I do? As long as I had the button, I was invincible.

Then, I recalled something he had said earlier.

The bombs aren't...kill people...a bit of a fire, to create the optimal—

Taishi had been trying to create an environment to allow the virus to spread, he had said.

Then what if the virus was somewhere separate from the bombs? Or, wait—

I had to find Natsuki.

I would be able to pick up hints once I found her. Natsuki had been infected. If I went to where she had been during the fire, I would understand how she came to be one of the ones who caught the virus.

The shutters started to close.

I dove under the descending gate, into the building.

Inside, there were people everywhere, trapped.

The explosions would happen soon.

If the virus was in a place other than the bombs, it would most likely—

I called Natsuki on my phone. She answered immediately, saying,

“Where are you? Did you get my text?”

It didn’t seem like she had noticed that the shutters had closed.

“Natsuki, where are you right now?”

“I’m on the second floor—”

Just then, explosions shook the building.

I could hear the sounds of the bombs going off from the phone speaker, and felt the vibrations.

“Natsuki, I’m coming to find you! Where on the second floor are you?”

“Wait, there’s a fire or something!”

“Natsuki!”

The call was cut off.

I ran as fast as I could, up the escalator, to Natsuki—!

The crowd on second floor was thrumming with panic. There were small fires all over the place, surrounded by increasingly thick smoke.

“Natsuki! Where are you? Natsuki!!”

I shouted for her even though my voice was growing hoarse, but her name was drowned out by the chaos.

Natsuki had said that she was with a bunch of kids, right?

20 meters ahead of me, the entrance to the restrooms burst into flames. Startled by the explosion, the people nearby all started running away from the fire, and towards me.

I looked a little further to a makeshift stage, with a signboard decorated with heroes’ names that I had seen somewhere before, and posters all over the walls.

The posters had the same heroes that Natsuki, Shuu, and I had gone to see that summer day.

Right, Natsuki had told us once that they had done a show at the station, too.

She was probably nearby, with the kids.

I sprinted toward the stage.

By the stage I could see folding chairs scattered everywhere. A little further, huddled in a corner, were a small group of children, and alongside them—

Natsuki!

I scanned the area, trying to grasp the situation. There was one kid by the restrooms who was sitting up after having fallen. Natsuki ran to him, holding him in her arms.

The fire by the restrooms had grown unexpectedly vicious. Natsuki reached for the fire extinguisher placed by the wall.

—Ah! The fire extinguisher!

Back then, Natsuki's clothes had been covered with the fire extinguisher foam.

What if that substance was what contained the virus?

The fire extinguisher was small and had no label. It was identical to the one that I had caught a glimpse of in the car earlier.

There was no doubt—it was a fake.

The explosions were supposed to cause someone to pull the pin on a fire extinguisher and let the deadly virus loose in this airtight space. Even with the low infectious capacity, in a space like this with so many people and nowhere to go, direct contact with the virus would be sure to infect quite a few people.

Man, what a clever set-up.

Natsuki had her finger poised on the pin of the fire extinguisher.

I could not allow her to spray that thing.

“Natsuki! Don’t use the fire extinguisher!”

For the first time, she noticed that I was there.

“Eh? Yuuto?”

Embers, caused by the explosions up on the third floor, had fallen down and blazed to life in between us. I could only watch as it consumed the folding chairs that had once housed the audience of the hero show. Tongues of flame flickered at the ceiling, and the banners turned to tatters of cloth that rained down between us. Although I was so close to Natsuki that I felt like we could probably reach out and touch each others’ hands, the fire all but prevented all that.

Smoke was rising, filling the atrium above us.

I could still see Natsuki’s face about ten meters away, through the flames.

“Natsuki!”

She was surrounded by flames now. She looked like she was on the verge of tears.

“Why? Why aren’t I allowed to use it?”

“Just because!”

“But why? I want to know!”

“I’ll get you out of there, so just wait!”

“How are you going to manage that?!”

Natsuki huddled with the rest of the kids, watching as the fire drew closer on all sides. The flames were slowly getting bigger, enveloping everything in sight.

It would be impossible, now, to put out a fire of this size.

—My only choice now would be to reset...

I hefted the button in my hand.

What would my plan be after I went back? How could I avoid being cornered by the situation?

I couldn’t figure it out.

What if, after resetting, I collapsed, like I had earlier? If I couldn’t think clearly from the vertigo?

And what if the next reset were to tip me over the edge, send me into a coma...?

I shook my head, and faced the sea of flames once more.

The only thing left to do was play all of my cards, and think on my feet.

In order for any of this to be worth it, I needed to save Natsuki and the kids from the flames that separated me from them. I had to eradicate the fire, without using the bogus fire extinguisher.

The water pipes? No, I wouldn't be able to make it in time.

Something, anything—

The flames continued to dance before me, as if mocking me. One of the posters advertising the hero show began to go up in flames.

I spotted a black hose that appeared to encircle the stage. At one end of the hose was a black flare that somehow reminded me of a trumpet.

I thought back to the hero show that I'd seen that summer.

The heroes' entrance had been accompanied by a burst of white smoke.

Perhaps the smoke was dry ice...!

I followed the black hose to its origin backstage. Dry ice was solid carbon dioxide, right? So if I were to put it on a fire, it would be extinguished from lack of oxygen, probably.

I crawled forward hurriedly on my hands and knees, tracing the hose deeper backstage, until I reached its source...

“...What the hell is this?”

A gas cylinder, painted green, stood there. It was about as tall as my chest, with white letters painted neatly on the side: *Liquid Carbon Dioxide*

“It wasn't dry ice, then...?”

My shoulders slumped in disappointment, but then I remembered something.

“Wait a minute! This is just what I need!”

Sure, it wasn't dry ice, but liquid carbon dioxide was still carbon dioxide. It should still be able to put out the fire...

There was no time to lose, and my options were running low at this point.

I gathered as much of the hose together as I could and dragged it out, bringing along the gas cylinder, which was about fifty kilograms, along with it, and faced the roaring fire.

“Natsuki! I’m gonna get you out of there!”

Despite that declaration of purpose, when I walked towards her, it was at a sluggish pace. The gas cylinder was round, long, and heavy, making it incredibly difficult for me to maintain my grip on it without losing balance. After what seemed like an eternity, I reached the sea of flames and picked up the hose.

I then pressed the red button located at the base of the hose flare.

A thick white smoke began pouring out immediately, with such power that it probably would have reached the third floor, were I to aim it upwards. The vaporising of the carbon dioxide caused flecks of frosty residue to come out as well.

I aimed the hose along the floor. Smoke spread out in all directions, crawling along the ground and consuming the fire. Asphyxiated by the carbon dioxide, the flames gradually died down.

I waved the hose around, mowing the flames down. A familiar sharp, carbonic sensation pricked at my nose, like the time I’d chugged a soda in one go.

I pressed forward, hose in hand. Stepping over the piles of pipe that were once folding chairs, I spread the smoke all around me. At the base of the hose flare, ice began to form, sticking to my hand as I continued.

By now, the path from me to Natsuki was cleared of flames by the carbon dioxide smoke.

The smoke was thick, covering the whole scene like fog. As it did, the whole area felt colder.

Although most of the fire had been put out by the carbon dioxide, I continued to brandish the spray right and left, as if warning the flames not to come any closer.

“Natsuki!”

The fire should all be taken care of by now.

“Natsuki!” I called again.

She came rushing towards me, ducking under the smoke.

“Yuuto!”

She was still holding the fire extinguisher, with her finger on the pin, ready to pull it out.

“I told you not to use that!”

I snatched the cylinder away from her. She looked up at me, a thousand questions waiting to burst from her lips.

“Yuuto, where have you been?”

“I’ve been trying to reach you. First things first, though, let’s get ourselves over there. The shutters are still closed, so we won’t be able to get out right away, but help will be here soon.”

I ushered Natsuki and the kids to an area with fewer fires.

Then I recognized one of the kids as the girl from the hospital. It was a relieve to know that she hadn’t been infected this time either...

“I’m glad you’re okay, uh...”

I couldn’t recall her name.

She looked at me, confusion in her eyes.

All that was left to do was let time take its course. The explosions continued for a while, and I could see that Natsuki and the kids were exhausted.

I held onto the fire extinguisher, never letting go.

I knew that this situation would draw to a close before long. There was no working around the situation Taishi had set up. I may have prevented the use of the fire extinguisher, but there was still no getting out the building at the moment.

After what seemed like hours, the shutters rolled open.

“Hey, Yuuto? Why didn’t you show up at the time we agreed on?”

“I went to the place a bit before the time we were supposed to meet up, but then I had to go do something.”

“Then you should have told me.”

“Sorry.”

“Anyway, why did you ask me to meet with you today? Oh, and congrats on getting into high school!”

“You too, congrats.”

“Thank you! We’ll be attending high school together, then...”

I couldn’t help feeling a swell of happiness upon hearing that she, too, was aware of how long we had gone to school together. What the hell, I thought. Why did these feelings have to come bubbling up now?

“Sorry that you’re stuck with me.”

“Same here, aren’t you getting tired of me?”

“Course not.”

Of course I wasn’t. I was thrilled at the prospect of attending the same high school as Natsuki.

...wasn’t I?

“So, why are we here today?”

“Well, I...uh...?”

“What’s wrong?”

What was wrong, indeed. My memories had suddenly...Why couldn’t I remember the reason for our meeting today? My memories were all mixed up and vague.

“I don’t...know. Well, whatever, I guess.”

“Well whatever’ my ass, Yuuto. I came all the way out here for nothing?”

“I really just don’t know. I mean, I have the impression that I had something important to do, but I don’t remember what.”

“Then it must not have been important.”

“Probably.”

She was probably right.

...probably. Yeah.

Anyway, it was fine. I had done my job here.

What was my job anyway? What was...

In any case, it felt like a great weight had been lifted off my shoulders.



The light suddenly disappeared from the world. All traces of light. So did all of my knowledge.

All that was left was color. It was as if I had been prevented from entering the monochrome world and was put here instead.

And thus began a time where each new day was just another day to get through.



[Next part →](#)

Life Reset Button Novel

» Life Reset Button Novel - Ch. 6: One Morning, After Opening My Eyes - Pt. 2 + Afterword

[PANDORA VOXX novels masterpost](#)

[← Ch. 6 Pt. 1](#) ♦ [end]

Please consider supporting the creators by buying the novel from [Amazon](#), [HMV](#), or [YesAsia](#)! All three ship internationally.

The is the final part of the Life Reset Button novel! It's been nearly a year and a half since I started (sorry for taking so long) and it's been quite an adventure. Thank you all for sticking with me. I hope you all enjoyed the ride!

Now, without further ado, here's the final part!

What was there to even wish for, if I had happiness like this?

—

Chapter 6: My Dream for the Future...What Was It Again?

Part 2

Natsuki, Shuu, and I all went to Karima High School together. I was in the going-home club, while Natsuki was in volleyball and Shuu was in baseball. Such active people, I thought to myself.

Meanwhile, the ringing in my ears was getting worse, so much so that I was pretty much unable to concentrate on anything. Although I went to see the ENT specialist again, my memory was so bad that I found myself unable to recall when the ringing had started.

It wasn't usually so bad that I couldn't remember yesterday's lunch. On the other hand, there were times when I couldn't even remember last night's dinner. What I could remember was stuff like how the food had all been stuff I really liked, those sort of vague descriptions.

During my first semester in high school, I was called in by the police for

questioning quite a few times.

Taishi's professor at college—an assistant professor named Kakitagawa—had already told the police about this temperature-sensitive virus, about how its infectious capacity would change just by being exposed to air and as such was hard to work with. They concluded with that information that the fire extinguishers, being airtight, would be excellent storage containers for the virus.

When they did investigate the fire extinguishers in question, they found that there was, indeed, a virus inside with a low infectious capacity but high fatality rate. They removed all of the fire extinguishers that could be recovered at the concourse, and found that although some had been used, miraculously enough, no one had fallen ill. It was determined that this was because the temperature within the concourse hadn't been high enough. The police also found an identical fire extinguisher located in Taishi's car, which he'd left in the parking garage. They began to suspect that I was somehow involved in this whole situation. My memory was so sparse that I had no way to confirm it, one way or the other.

My brother's whereabouts remained unknown. In the hopes of preventing a similar event from happening, the police ordered a top-secret operation to track him down. As for the assistant professor named Kakitagawa—he became a whistleblower on Danan Pharmaceutical's corruption scandal, and for a brief period of time, was a big deal in the news.

My high school life slowly whittled away at my time.

On one of the days with no club activities, Natsuki asked me to help with cleaning up. I agreed easily, thinking that it would be unfair to make Natsuki do all the work, but it turned out that all of the girls in the class were there, too. I had to do more heavy lifting than I'd anticipated, and in the very end, had to help them take out the garbage, too.

Natsuki and I lifted the bin and headed towards the incinerators down on the sports grounds. It was then that we heard a heated conversation from inside the storage shed.

"Fujiyoshi-kun...do you have a girlfriend?"
"Nope."

“Then please go out with me!”

“...Sorry.”

“Why not?”

“I’m not interested.”

“You...you think that badly of me?”

“That’s not what I meant. I’m just not interested in being in a relationship right now.”

“That’s so...”

Natsuki dragged me away from the conversation, muttering, “That Shuu doesn’t know the first thing about girls.”

“Well, Natsuki, you don’t know the first thing about boys, then,” I retorted. She pouted a bit, and for a brief moment, sadness flickered over her face. No wonder, I thought, girls were so hard to understand, what with their changing their moods at the drop of a hat.

The next night, Shuu asked me to meet up with him so we could talk. That was unusual.

“I’ve entered a relationship with Natsuki.”

I expected nothing less of Shuu. Straight to the point, like a real man.

“Good for you. I’m glad it’s Natsuki.”

“You’re not bothered by it?”

“Why would I be? The three of us can still be friends, can’t we?”

“That’s not what I’m saying...It’s just that, you like her too, don’t you?”

“Not realllyyyy...?”

What was going on? I couldn’t remember...couldn’t...

Of course, Natsuki was someone special to me. I knew that. But I couldn’t for the life of me figure out just what kind of special she was. I had the impression that a voice in the back of my mind—from the hippocampus, I felt—rebuked me, saying, well, it doesn’t matter anyway, does it?

“It doesn’t matter anyway, right, since it’s you.”

I meant it.

But still, I dunno, I felt a little something.

I reached out with my right hand, and punched Shuu gently in the chest.

"So you do mind."

"I don't. But still, I dunno."

For some reason, I feel so frustrated, I thought.

As the midterms drew closer, the three of us studied together again.

However, the only ones who were studying diligently were Shuu and Natsuki. Instead, I would go up to the library desk and check out books that had absolutely nothing to do with our studies.

Books were nice. It felt good to replace the fading memories in my head with new knowledge. Out with the old, and in with the new, like running a cycle through my brain.

Having finished the book I'd borrowed, I got up and went over to the counter.

"Hello."

"This may be weird, but uh, have we met somewhere?"

"You've already forgotten me, Yuuto?"

"Uhh..."

The short-haired librarian peered at me as she spoke.

"Do you have a strong wish?"

"Who, me?"

"Yes, you. A strong wish. Your wish."

"A wish..."

The librarian's tone made the conversation feel both vexing and familiar. She had the air of an angel—no, more like the air of a god, perhaps.

Speaking of wishes, though, at that moment, I didn't have any strong desires in particular. In fact, once I thought about it, I realized that I had everything I wanted.

Objectively speaking, I was extremely content with my life.

I, Hashidate Yuuto, was living a quiet and peaceful life, devoid of any needs of desires.

“Do you have any wishes yourself?” I asked the librarian.

“I like to listen to others’ wishes, I think.”

“I think it’s best to go about not wishing for anything. If you don’t ask for anything you can happily live a peaceful existence. After all, wishing for something and never having that wish fulfilled seems awful.”

“But if no one wished for anything, the gods would be out of a job, no?”

“Oh, that’s true.”

“So maybe from now on you should try letting yourself wish for things just like everyone else, okay?”

“Okay.”

The librarian with the air of a god took the book from my hand and placed it back on the shelf.

What was there for me to wish for?

If I had to decide on something, it would be for me to live this same sort of quiet life in my next life, I guess.

I mean, ignoring the fact that I don’t even believe in reincarnation.

When I returned to the private study room, Shuu and Natsuki were kissing.

Well, it was my fault for walking right in without knocking first.

The two startled like deer and separated with an awkward glance. I tried to maintain my composure.

“I don’t mind.”

I think I blurted it out a bit too quickly to sound sincere, but really, I didn’t mind, and I wanted them to know that.

“It’s fine, really. I’m happy just knowing that you two are happy.”

Natsuki seemed embarrassed, and Shuu hit me on the back for no apparent reason.

The warm atmosphere in that study room was so wonderful to me that I could

hardly bear it.

Now this was happiness.

What was there to even wish for, if I had happiness like this?



Time seemed to crawl by even more slowly.

Trying to think with this dulled brain of mine made me feel like I was part of this world, yet at the same time, like I was peering at a faraway world.

It might have been me slowly becoming unable to clearly draw the line what was real and what was not. But it wasn't like I thought there was such thing as unreality, anyway. The feeling was more like, even if I saw reality right in front of me, it was hard for me to accept that it was real, I think.

I sat on the stairs that led up to the bank entrance, watching the glow of the streetlamps.

I didn't have anything in mind, doing that. It's just that by the time I had realized it, I had found myself sitting on the steps, with no idea where all the time had gone. I got the impression that I was hungry. I also got the impression that the feeling of "hunger" was sitting in my stomach. I got the impression that my autonomic nervous system was being stimulated with signals that told me that I was experiencing this feeling called "hunger".

It didn't make much sense to me.

Maybe "by the time I had realized it, I had no idea where all the time had gone" was not really what I meant.

I think, once upon a time, I was a person who sought to be perfect, who had decided that I could live a perfect and tidy life. How I really lived back then, and the feeling of wanting to live a perfect life—I don't remember either of those.

Did the current me have any meaning in living?

The though occurred to me that, wow, this kind of life is terrible, but at the same time, I didn't think it was all that bad to live like this.

I was happy, and satisfied.

I should just set all this stuff about Maki-chan and my life aside.

...Maki-chan? Who's that?

Well, whatever.

Just stick with the rhythm.

I heard a voice from inside my head. Inside my hippocampus. Like a professor.

—This life is terrible, just terrible.

The voice in my hippocampus willed me to stand up, so I did.

The flow of the pedestrians began to shift. 5 in the morning. It was almost time for the first train to arrive.

Countless people said their goodbyes and see-you-laters to each other. They were laughing, but there was a hint of exhaustion on their faces. Well, it was five in the morning, after all, so it was understandable.

Staggering, I followed behind a shadowy figure who stood out in the sea of people.

Through the ticket gates and onto the platform I went.

The first train of the day was approaching.

A wind kicked up and pushed me from behind. I'll just let the wind do as it wants, I thought.

My feet left the platform as if I were being swallowed up by the tunnel, and plunged in front of the train.

There was a strange sense of relief telling me that this time, I would be able to die.

I thought that this was the answer, but who knows?



Jiriririririririri!

My alarm clock wasn't a digital one; rather, it had a metallic bell chime and a round clock face, with two silver bells on top.

I've heard it said that the sharp metallic noise is bad for the heart, but I, for

one, welcomed this sort of auditory assault.

My alarm clock was awesome. The shock from the noise cleared my head. I only needed to sleep as many hours as my alarm clock would allow me.

I sat up on the bed and looked on the ceiling, then flopped down on my side.

Above the carpet of my room, next to my small mountain of reference books, was a small box. It rotated in midair, alternating between tilting and straightening itself.

I crawled out of my bed and grasped the box in my hand. There was a red button perched on one of its six sides.

"A box, with a button on it," I muttered. "What could it be?"

The second the words left my lips, a voice resounded from inside my head.

—Will you wish?

Who was that?

Where was the voice coming from?

Will you not wish?

Wish? For what?

I got the impression that I had heard this voice before.

Somehow, I also thought that this box felt familiar, as if I had played with it when I was child or something...

The voice continued to murmur in my ear.

"It's not Game Over yet, you know?"

Afterword

Hello. I'm Kimoto Masahiko, the writer of "Life Reset Button".

This work comes from one of the songs produced by KEMU VOXX.

As you know, KEMU VOXX's songs do not mention specific characters. The protagonist is introduced as a "young man," and the identity of that young man is up to the audience. People have told me that when they heard the song "Life Reset Button", it gave them the feeling that a great journey was about to begin in his life. In this book, I have merely attempting to put that feeling to prose.

As this song series is riddled with mysteries, one may be tempted to view this work as depicting the official setting and establishing the canon. However, that is not the case. In fact, the information that I have received from KEMU VOXX is scarcely any more than what has been divulged to the fans publicly. Every character in the book, aside from Maki-chan, is a character of my own devising. Therefore, please think of them as only one of many possible representations of KEMU VOXX's works.

Of course, everything from the basic plot points to the final draft has been looked over by the KEMU VOXX team, so rest assured that my vision does not stray too far from what they have intended to portray. I hope that this may assuage any fears you may have about the accuracy of this work.

Now, many of you will probably recall a day very similar to mine, one summer day last year (2012), where, thinking, "I wonder what sort of Vocaloid songs have been uploaded lately?" you checked Nico Nico Douga and found that a unit called KEMU VOXX had uploaded a video of some sort, right?

I, who tended not to listen to lyrics even in songs with human vocals, simply listened to the song as nothing more than sound. Yet, combined with the impact of the melody, the song spoke to me, in a way. That was how strongly it impacted me.

Shortly thereafter, I received an invitation to write a novelization of the series, and instantly agreed.

Yes, the works of KEMU VOXX were that fascinating to me.

In my opinion, the novelization of this series was quite different from similar endeavors with other Vocaloid series. For one, the Vocaloids themselves were not characters. There did not even exist established characters (with the exception of Maki-chan). There was clearly a storyline, but it was presented in hints.

This process of creating both characters and story from nearly nothing was, I believe, quite different from the usual process of novelization. It was like deciphering, excavating, and creating a new work from scratch, all at the same time. And because there were hints in the lyrics, I could not allow myself to deviate from those hints. It was a very mysterious yet exhilarating process.

And so, although it took much longer than I had anticipated at first, my novelization of “Life Reset Button” has at last reached your hands, dear reader.

I hope you enjoy my depiction of what it would be like to have a reset button.

My thanks to everyone at PHP Kenkyuusho, especially Miyakawa-sama, for giving me lots of advice. Also I would like to thank my wife, who had to deal with me coming home from work and subsequently working at home. Finally, I would like to thank my son, who has healed me many a time with his smile.

Kimoto Masahiko

Comments

(These come with illustrations of Maki-chan and Natsuki respectively, which I have not included).

hatsuko: (next to Maki-chan) Kay, I'm gonna go reset a life, seeya! Peace!
Thank you very much!

kemu: Congratulations on finishing! I'm amazed that my lyrics became a book.

Suzumu: I told you already, I dont wanna!! I'm going home, bye (death flag)

ke-sanβ: I want to mash the life reset button like I'm playing a rhythm game, but one hasn't appeared in front of me yet.

Takamura Fumi:

Hello. I was in charge of the illustration for this book. I had a hard time deciding who to draw for the comments, but I realized that I had drawn a lot of Yuutos for the book, so here's Natsuki!

Natsuki and Shuu went through a lot, so I like to think they were a happy couple in the end. I feel bad for Yuuto, though...

The story and character designs made the illustrations very fun to draw! Thank you very much!

[end]

—

Notes:

Now that you've finished reading the novel, you might want to read over [my translation of the lyrics](#) to see how it all ties in. It's pretty fun to see how Kimoto-sensei interpreted the lyrics and wove them into a story.